

## Retail proposal for William Stanley Business Park on hold

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PITTSFIELD -- A proposed large retail development in the William Stanley Business Park is officially on hold.

Project developer Waterstone Retail Development Inc. "is still interested [in pursuing a project] but does not want to move forward at this time," said Corydon Thurston, executive director of the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority.

The Needham-based firm notified PEDA, which manages the 52-acre William Stanley Business Park on former GE property off East Street, that it won't ask the quasi-public agency's board to vote to authorize a letter of intent for the development. That approval would have allowed Waterstone to begin seeking city permits for the unnamed 200,000-square-foot retail facility.

Thurston said a letter from Waterstone principal Neal Shalom was sent to PEDA before the authority board's Oct. 30 meeting, at which a vote on the \$30 million retail project might have been considered. The firm asked that the request be withdrawn at this time.

The decision followed a public forum PEDA held Sept. 30 at City Hall that drew about 100 residents and others. While some of the two dozen speakers said they would welcome the project and its associated employment during construction and afterward -- along with the tax revenue to the city -- many others urged PEDA to wait for manufacturing tenants at the park.

The Stanley Business Park was conceived as a site for industry, especially advanced manufacturing. The land parcels were turned over to PEDA over the past decade as part of the consent agreement that led to a GE-funded cleanup of contaminated parcels in its former power transformer operation in the vicinity of Silver Lake.

In his Oct. 29 letter to PEDA, Shalom said in part: "Based on the public response from our recent meeting, we have decided not to ask the [PEDA] board members to vote on acceptance of our proposal for a binding business agreement. Instead, we are going to work together with all city and public groups to redefine the scope of our project and develop a dynamic mixed-use master plan for the William Stanley Business Park."

Thurston said the idea of another Pittsfield site for the unnamed retail company has been discussed with city officials, but no firm proposals have surfaced.

"I know they have been looking, that they have been brought around [to potential sites]," said Mayor Daniel L. Bianchi, referring to Waterstone officials. But he did not know of any new development proposal within the city.

Shalom could not be reached Monday for comment.

The mayor, who sits on the PEDA board, was a critic of allowing a retail project in the Stanley park, favoring continued efforts to attract manufacturing firms with higher-paying jobs. "I think I had a pretty

good sense of where the public is on that," he said.

One factor seen by most as a plus for the development plan was the retail firm's willingness to fund removal of old GE building foundations from the 16-acre parcel it sought. The structures are contaminated with industrial wastes and would be expensive to break down and haul away to a disposal site.

Thurston said that aspect of site preparation has been estimated to cost from \$5 million to \$6 million. Those favoring the retail project said they believe that expense is an obstacle industrial firms will find insurmountable and go elsewhere.

Concerning efforts to remove contamination and prepare the park's largest parcel for use, Bianchi said he has talked to state and federal lawmakers and to Gov. Deval Patrick about the issue and will continue to pursue any option to help fund lot improvements at the park.

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