

LEXINGTON

Two biotech plans seeking approval at Town Meeting

By Brock Parker, Boston Globe, November 8, 2009

Two large development proposals that could boost Lexington's growing reputation as a home for biotechnology are about to come up for a vote.

In separate proposals, Lexington Technology Park developers Patriot Partners and Cubist Pharmaceuticals Inc. are seeking to build a total of about 500,000 square feet in research and office space that could generate almost \$3 million in tax revenue for the town each year.

In the midst of a tough economy that has strained state and local budgets, the Board of Selectmen's chairman, Norman Cohen, said the development proposals offer an important opportunity to create new revenue.

"To have the prospect of increased revenue at this time would mean a great deal," Cohen said.

But both proposals are on the warrant seeking approval from Special Town Meeting tomorrow night, and some neighbors say they still have concerns about Patriot Partners proposal to build two new buildings at Lexington Technology Park.

The park, the former home of defense contractor Raytheon Co., now houses the genetic therapies division of British drug-maker Shire Pharmaceuticals.

Patrick Morin, who lives on Shade Street next to the technology park, said he has concerns about noise and traffic spilling over onto his street, even though he is hoping revenue created by the new construction could help to keep his property taxes down.

"I think it's good for the town; I think it's great for the state because it's high-paying jobs" that would be created, Morin said. "We just want to make sure that our quality of life doesn't get desecrated."

Town Meeting member Thomas Fenn, who also lives next to the technology park, said he has supported multiple buildings Patriot Partners has already developed along Patriot Way since Raytheon moved out.

But Fenn said some of that development has created horrible noise he can hear in the neighborhood when he walks his dog. Fenn said he will not vote in support of the Patriot Partners proposal at Town Meeting.

"I'm not going to support their additional construction," Fenn said. "It's developed enough for me."

Patriot Partners has already completed several new construction or renovation projects in the 95-acre commercial complex, including buildings at 300 and 400 Patriot Way. It has also obtained approval for a 160,000-square-foot building at 200 Patriot Way slated to break ground in March and be occupied by Shire by 2012.

Patriot Partners principal Stephen Rice said neighbors have raised concerns about noise created by mechanical equipment on the roof of 300 Patriot Way, a building that Patriot Partners reconstructed and is now occupied by Shire.

Rice said Patriot Partners and Shire hired sound engineers to monitor the noise and will make a significant investment to reduce the sound. But Rice said the noise created by the equipment does not violate the town's noise ordinance.

Selectwoman Jeanne Krieger said noise levels, and how noise will be monitored, at the new buildings proposed by Patriot Partners remain an issue.

She also said that the developer and Shire have both shown a good faith effort to reduce the noise, and she supports the project.

Patriot Partners' proposal would create an additional 380,000 square feet of research or office space at 100 and 600 Patriot Way, as well as parking garages with up to 743 additional spaces. Patriot Partners estimates the project would create \$2.2 million in net tax revenue for Lexington annually.

Joe Zink, a principal of Patriot Partners and chief executive of a Framingham-based real estate investment company, Atlantic Management, said that if the project gets the go-ahead the construction would be completed in five to seven years.

The technology park, and the proposed development by Cubist Pharmaceuticals at its headquarters at 45, 55, and 65 Hayden Ave. in Lexington, both sit close to routes 2 and 128.

Cubist is seeking approval to build 110,000 square feet of additional research and office space, as well as a five-and-a-half-floor parking garage for about 300 vehicles, said Robert Buckley, a lawyer representing the company.

Unlike Lexington Technology Park, however, Cubist's property has no neighboring homes. The company's land sits next to the Hayden Woods conservation area.

Cubist estimates its additions would generate an extra \$500,000 in tax revenue for Lexington annually, and Buckley said if the proposal is approved construction could be underway at this time next year. Cubist needs the space to accommodate about 100 new employees, he said.

Buckley, who also represents Patriot Partners, said Lexington has recognized the benefits of hosting biotechnology companies and has created regulations to help the town capture the market.

"It's almost as if Lexington has hit the home run and everybody else is trying to figure out how to run around the bases," he said.

Zink said life-science companies are the ideal commercial neighbors because they bring in high-paying jobs, and the additional space needed for research labs also means there are fewer employees per square foot of development. As a result, the amount of traffic created by such operations is reduced, Zink said.

Lexington planning director Maryann McCall-Taylor said the town was not always known for encouraging economic development, but biotechnology companies have presented an opportunity that some believe could help support the town's financial future.

"We went out and we thought biotech and we succeeded," McCall-Taylor said.

While the potential revenue from the new development is important, McCall-Taylor said, the town is also attempting to protect itself if the space Patriot Partners is proposing to build is used as traditional office space instead for biotechnology.

While no tenants have signed on for the space, Zink said, Patriot Partners is hoping another life science company will move in, with Shire holding the right of first refusal for occupying the buildings.

The town is working with Patriot Partners to reduce the potential traffic at the technology park by encouraging shuttles to the Alewife MBTA stop, McCall-Taylor said.

Patriot Partners is also agreeing to pay the town up to about \$1.4 million, depending on how many of the 743 proposed parking spaces are built.

Vicki Blier, a Town Meeting member and technology park neighbor, said that she continues to have concerns about the Patriot Partners proposal, but because she's still reviewing recent submissions by the developer, she couldn't say last week whether she will vote in favor of it tomorrow night.

Blier said she wants to make sure that the town sets a very high standard about the noise that can be created by the new buildings.

"I really want to support it," Blier said. "But it does raise neighborhood problems that are difficult to solve."