

Lexington's commercial sector could undergo big changes

By Meghan B. Kelly, Lexington Minuteman

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Lexington - With new zoning laws, a new building in the works and two more commercial developments looming on the horizon, Lexington's commercial district could look very different in just a few years.

At this year's Annual Town Meeting, Town Meeting approved zoning changes at Hartwell Avenue, which would allow expanded development and different types of businesses to operate there without special permits.

In addition, at a Special Town Meeting in May, Town Meeting approved plans for Beal Companies to add a 162,000 square foot building to its Hayden Avenue campus.

This fall, Cubist, on Hartwell Avenue, and Patriot Partners, home to Shire on Spring Street, will also be submitting their expansion plans at a Special Town Meeting. Both have plans for public hearings throughout the summer and into the fall.

Beal Companies



Beal's journey to expansion, to build what it calls Ledgesmont 3, has been a long one. While not confirmed officially, the proposed tenant for Ledgesmont 3 is VistaPrint, an online printing company now located at Ledgesmont 2.

The town is expecting to hear back from the state attorney general's office on whether its zoning has been approved.

The company, meanwhile, is putting together marketing materials for the site, according to Lexington Economic Development Officer Susan Yanofsky.

It first filed for rezoning in 2003, but held back plans in deference to neighbors who did not want the street to be as visible on Spring Street as was proposed. In 2008, it filed again with the town, but delayed while the Planning Board drew up plans for development on Hartwell Avenue.

In the meantime, Beal went back to the drawing board, compiling responses and reactions from abutters and other neighbors. Most of the concern has centered around traffic and the size of the building.

Beal's final plans would move 20 percent of the building's mass from Woodcliffe Road, would take an enclosed penthouse off the roof, would change the building's outside façade from glass to brick, to blend better into the landscape, and would add landscaping along Spring Street and its property line.

It will also contribute \$800,000 to the town's transportation mitigation fund — \$500,000 upon issuance of a building permit and \$300,000 when the building is complete. Some of that money will also go toward LexPress, and an additional \$35,000 will go to fund a traffic plan for Spring Street and Hayden Avenue.

The Ledgesmont campus currently yields \$1.2 million in tax revenue, and is estimated to increase to \$1.74 million once the third building is constructed. It generates 3,180 car trips per day, according to a study by the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and the expansion would add 1,219 trips once it is fully built.

Ledgesmont 3 will be a LEED silver building, meeting U.S. Green Building Council standards for design and construction by using energy-renewing materials and sustainable construction materials such as hardwood.

Cubist



Cubist, a pharmaceutical company, has a good reason for expanding its space: Business is good.

“It’s all about growth,” said Cubist CFO David McGirr.

Cubist is growing, thanks to its work on new antibiotics to fight the so-called “superbug” infections that are resistant to other antibiotics. Its flagship drug, Cubicin, is used to combat MRSA infections.

The plans for Cubist’s expansion, at an estimated 104,000 square feet, call for adding two more stories on a one-story section of its building and a possible parking garage adjacent to the building.

The new area would mostly be lab space, with room for scientists’ offices, said McGirr. Because the company is planning to hire about 100 people in the next two or three years, it wants to have attractive lab space to offer scientists, who are in high demand in Massachusetts.

“We can build really nice facilities — that is one of the ways to persuade scientists to move,” said McGirr.

Cubist owns the building and wants to invest in its future. It filed paperwork with the town last week and hopes to bring the plans to Special Town Meeting in November. Company officials want to get started as soon as possible, said McGirr, because getting the permits and construction brings them up to an estimated completion date of late 2010 or early 2011.

The parking garage is not set in stone but could be seven levels, said McGirr. Because of the way the land slopes where the garage would go, it would not be visible from the surrounding neighborhoods.

The garage also won't change impervious surfaces and would just be built on top of an existing parking lot, said McGirr.

Like other developments along Hayden Avenue, Cubist has performed a traffic study to understand the effects of increased employee numbers on neighborhood traffic. The impact should be minimal, said McGirr.

"It's a fairly quiet bit of Hayden Avenue," he said.

What helps the traffic counts is Cubist's traffic demand management program, which sponsors a shuttle to and from Alewife, 100 percent transit subsidy for employees and lockers and showers for employees who ride their bicycles to work, as well as a carpool center, said Francis McLaughlin, senior manager for communications at Cubist.

Between now and Special Town Meeting in the fall, Cubist will be speaking at public hearings at the Planning Board, and will also sponsor an open house in September.

Patriot Partners



Patriot Partners, which owns the buildings currently housing Shire, among other companies, withdrew its plans for expansion at a Special Town Meeting in May.

“There were a number of people at Town Meeting who liked the proposal but wanted more time to consider the issue,” said Robert Buckley, an attorney from Riemer and Braunstein representing Patriot Partners.

The development company has met again with abutters and other residents and brought their new plan to the Planning Board last week, to eventually get to Special Town Meeting this fall.

Although it’s never been confirmed by Patriot Partners, the space would most likely be used by Shire. Representatives from Patriot Partners have repeatedly said they are looking at all options for tenants, including other pharmaceutical companies.

The biggest changes: Eliminate some of the proposed uses, pledges for expanded traffic studies and the fiscal benefit to the town. Patriot Partners estimates the town will get a net of \$2.3 million in tax revenue annually, more than the \$1.6 million the company had estimated in May.

Additionally, Patriot Partners estimates the town will get more than \$100 million over 20 years from increased tax revenue.

The plan itself hasn’t changed. Two buildings would add 380,000 square feet to the property’s current 465,000 square feet; increasing the floor area ratio (FAR) from .15 to .24. The new buildings would also increase the maximum heights from about 45 feet to between 65 and 80 feet.

Buckley said Patriot Partners plans to attend a series of public hearings before the Special Town Meeting.

“We wanted to avoid the ‘wasn’t enough time’ argument,” he said.

If all goes as planned at Town Meeting, Patriot Partners wants to start construction right away, “as soon as economically possible,” said Buckley.

“There is serious demand for this space in the Lexington corridor,” he said.

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