

**Lakes Region Facility  
Public Input Meeting  
August 24, 2010  
Laconia, NH**

7pm – Matt Lahey, Chairman of the Study Committee, opens with a synopsis of the history of the property. It was the state school prior to 1990, when the state opened the prison. In 2009 the site's use as a prison ended and a legislative study commission was formed to figure out the best, long term use of the property.

Lahey introduced the legislative study commission members who were present.

Kimon Koulet spoke next and explained how Lakes Region Planning Commission (LRPC) received an EPA Brownfields Area Wide program grant and at a Brownfields Conference happened to meet Mike Taylor, the President of Vita Nova. From their discussion it was determined that Mike's draft manual was perfect for a pilot program on this property. Under the Brownfields grant Kimon had hired the Environmental Consulting firm Credere Associates to perform a Phase I Environmental Assessment on the property.

Mike Taylor from Vita Nova explained that they've been studying the property with the understanding that public input was key. Mike began with a brief presentation of Vita Nova's review of the property. He introduced the scope of the work: opportunities and constraints, market analysis, and Phase I environmental assessment.

M. Taylor continued with the Opportunities and Constraints—the property includes three parcels and no shorefront. The site is highly visible and peak day traffic counts are about 10,000 in peak season. Zoning of the parcel was explained by Shanna B. Saunders. She said that the property is currently zoned as Residential Single Family, however it is perfectly situated between Rural Residential and Commercial zoning districts and the city could consider a zoning change or a variance to accommodate the highest and best uses. M. Taylor continued: there are several historic buildings that need attention and are regulated (asbestos, etc). There are 26 buildings total. There are three currently being used: a 911 emergency building, sex offender housing and community services building.

Market Analysis – M. Taylor looked at the market to see what was happening in the country. They looked at comparable prices of nearby land for sale. They summarized the existing real-estate market in Laconia. Prices of surrounding land range anywhere from 8k to 20K per acre.

Environmental – Jed Steinglass from Credere Associates said to complete the Phase 1 Assessment they walked inside the buildings and outside of the property; they reviewed existing documents and documented potential sources of contamination. The results were petroleum storage tanks, lead paint, asbestos, mold, floor drains, and buried or improperly stored hazardous waste, which are all typical. He noted that Phase 1 assessments do not involve physical testing.

Peter Mason of SRA International, Inc., interviewed state agencies and explained the results. The Dept. of Safety just spent a million dollars upgrading the 911 building and would like to stay there. Health and Human Services indicated they can move the sex offender building but will need time. Dept of Corrections still needs a women's prison, although this site may be off the table right now. Lakes Region Community College is interested in moving onto the property. The National Guard is also interested because they need a new, larger area for a training facility. And Department of Environmental Services (DES) has no need for the site but does need space for training.

Shanna B. Saunders did local interviews. She presented a list of what the community liked about the existing parcel, which included the open space, aesthetic value, proximity to Ahern Park, large area with the potential for multiple uses, and the presence of agricultural soils. She then presented a list of Municipal Dept. concerns and interests, including the site's potential location for the fire station and community concerns

including traffic, environmental issues, competition with downtown, possibility of a new prison, and the fact that the city and the state have no staff assigned to this project.

M. Taylor wrapped up the presentation and then opened the meeting to the public.

### **Name — Idea/Question — Response**

**Karen Barker**, a Laconia resident — Ms. Barker expressed an interest in agriculture activity for the property. Potential benefits include status enhancement, tourist draw to the area, and a return to agricultural emphasis. Such a use would also provide food security; currently agriculture in the state only provides 4-6 percent of the state's food needs. Anything we can do to supplement that would be good. She sent some relevant information to Vita Nuova.

NH has small and struggling farms and a food hub could provide help to these farms and lower the age of farmers in the state. "We need to grow farmers."

There is a limited amount of agricultural land in NH as the state does not have a lot of tillable soil. Ms. Barker showed a map of the parcel with green areas indicating agriculturally suitable land. She said that they do not need the entire parcel, just some of the land and some of the buildings. Agricultural use could be compatible with the other uses mentioned. She mentioned a report that identifies the opportunities and threats to the state's agriculture capacity.

**Michael Taylor (MT), Facilitator** — What we have seen is over time in our other projects to create synergy between uses.

**David Stamps**, a Laconia resident — Mr. Stamps was a member of the planning board when the prison came in and felt like the state "ripped the carpet out from under Laconia" like if this were to be used as a prison again or National Guard facility. Education should be the primary focus of the reuse of the property. Laconia is really tied to education and the community is educationally oriented. Whatever is done with the property, it needs to preserve the site's beauty and open space. He suggested a municipal trust that would manage the uses of the property for the good of the public. The state needs to work with the municipality to make this happen.

**Mark Edelstein**, Lakes Region Community College — Dr. Edelstein commented that history repeats itself, as the community has been involved in this discussion for 20 years, and this is the third time that the state and community have engaged in these discussions. Lakes Region Community College (LRCC), then NH Technical College, proposed moving to the state facility. The minority report noted that during these public hearings businesses advocated the technical college as the property's future use.

Use of the site as a prison began in 1990, and the college submitted another plan. Again, the college had the support of the community and the committee supported a mixed reuse for the property. A new community college would be a "synergistic entity" with a conference center, arts organization, business incubator, and agriculture. A synergistic use of the property would provide the best economic outcome.

**Dave Wunsch**, Laconia resident and State Geologist — Mr. Wunsch's property abuts some of the pieces of the Lakes Region Facility. The Lakes Region Facility property sits on a hill that separates two watersheds and whatever is done on the property will effect both those watersheds. The lakes are among the greatest resources in the lakes region. There is not much riparian zone on the Opechee side. On the other side you do not want non-pervious surfaces to increase runoff; he advised caution. He is leaning toward the educational reuse proposals for this property. In addition, green energy might be an option as geographically the property is an outstanding location for solar photovoltaic potential, wind turbines, or geothermal possibilities. Educational facilities are perfect especially in the off season times. Education is recession proof.

**MT** — I am hearing that the property needs to be developed sustainably.

**Edward Engler**, a member of the Belknap County Economic Development Council — Mr. Engler came from an economic development perspective. He wanted to encourage the members of the committee to recognize what is happening in our region and how old we are getting. From an economic perspective, this is a great opportunity to take a step in the opposite direction. We are becoming more and more a retirement community. There are a lot of people who are not happy with this. With this property, Laconia can find a way to return to a “regular” community. What opportunity does this present for this transformative property? The first thing that should be vetted and crossed off the list is whether the state can attract a large corporate headquarters to the property and bring all the benefits of a nice corporate campus.

Plano, Texas — JC Penney moved out of NYC and brought 5,500 white collar jobs to Plano. Think of the overall impact that a use like this would have on the City of Laconia. Laconia would become branded with the corporation. Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) should be tasked to look at this as a possibility.

**MT** — What is the process for the future of the land? The commission.

**George Roberts**, Belknap County Resident — A multi-educational siting would be the best reuse of the property. Mr. Roberts commented that he would not exclude the possibility for student housing on the property as well. He also commented that we should not exclude those community members over the age of 65 from the benefits of an educational reuse; people who have worked through their lives can also utilize a variety of curricula. The best long-term use for the property would be an educational center that would also allow for uses that generated tax revenue.

**Warren Hutchins**, Weirs Beach resident — Mr. Hutchins supports the ways that built the country, creation of business and jobs. We need good paying jobs. He also suggested that a section be reserved for LRCC that can focus on the training needs of the communities.

Land Trust – the amount of land a company could utilize would be determined by the amount of jobs that the company brings to the area. The state now has an asset that could be converted into something that would generate income and serve as a property tax base for the city of Laconia. The entire Lakes Region would benefit from the reuse of the property. The people who would work there would live in a variety of the communities around the lakes region.

**MT** — Keep in mind that some of the buildings will need significant repair costs.

**Bill Contardo**, Laconia resident — There are a lot of people moving into the area that have their own expertise. Look at the long term, not 2 or 10 years. The community should have the ability to draw upon its resources and skills. In addition, there is the possibility to draw a business affiliation through the college and populate this facility. This could all be part of the community college and if you have these incubators here, people will come forward.

**Henry Lipman**, Laconia resident — For the health of the area, the city needs more diversity of business than the direction we are heading. Given the political forces at work, the property should be overseen by a redevelopment authority. For example, Pease Redevelopment Authority and what they did at the Trade Port. A diversity of uses seems like the best approach. Pease is a good example of what can be done. By the time things work their way through the political delays things will change. Step 1 should be to get the property under some authority’s control. This will create flexibility with what is going to be done with the property.

**Tom Barker**, a Laconia resident — Mr. Barker is completely behind the alternative energy and synergistic ideas for the property’s reuse. What if part of the farm program involved growing food for the schools?

That could happen here. Growing food that could support our school system also has an interpretive benefit in addition to the food benefit. He also addressed the concept of drawing younger residents to Laconia and made the point that what young people look at is the schools and what they have to offer.

**David Evans** – Two brief questions

1. DOC – the last proposal was to move the Youth Development Center (YDC) to the property
  - a. Need for a new women's prison? Does that mean that they are seriously considering this property for that use?

**M. Lahey** talked about two options: the juvenile corrections and a women's prison; the DOC is looking for available land for both in NH. However, at the moment it appears that the facility is not suitable for juveniles and he has been told that the woman's prison is off table.

**Ben Baroody**, a representative from Manchester, said the Commissioner of the Dept. of Corrections doesn't want the women's prison to move back to Laconia.

2. Timeframe for when the environmental assessment will be done?

**Mike Connor (DAS)** — At least a year away from when the legislature will have the money for the Phase II Assessment for the property.

**Warren Clement**, Laconia resident — All these ideas are 5 to 10 years out. He wanted to remind the commission that there are two other parcels that don't need to be cleaned up, so it makes them easier to develop immediately.

**Elizabeth Obelenus**, a Meredith resident — Ms. Obelenus sells food in Laconia. She suggests that there is a tremendous interest in Laconia for local products. She has worked for the last few years promoting organic farming. She pointed to the fact that there are two large farmers' markets on Saturdays and both are very successful. She implored the commission not to disturb the farming soil. There will be problems with our food systems and we need additional farm space.

She said farms can exist in the middle of a city. There is a farm in Boston that is the oldest farm in an urban area. Most farmers have two jobs.

"Nubanuset," is an example of a new development in Peterborough that includes housing with farming, "green" housing. These uses are compatible.

**Dean Anson**, Laconia resident — Mr. Anson encouraged the commission to find money to do the Phase II assessment ASAP. This assessment is critical to estimate how much it will cost to clean up the property. The cost of a Phase II can kill a project and that cleanup cost information is needed. Waiting a year is a bad idea and the commission should go to EPA or another entity to raise the funds for the Phase II.

The City of Laconia (Conservation Commission) performed a natural resource inventory, which indicated that wildlife should be on the list of priorities. The state performed a study that showed that the waters of the state generate \$1.5 billion of revenue per year. Whatever is considered, water quality needs to be maintained to preserve this revenue.

With the Community College there is an opportunity for wind and solar energy generation. Community gardens could also use photovoltaic to pump water from the lake for use in the gardens.

Mr. Anson recommended that the commission look at the natural resource inventory and use those recommendations to guide reuse of the property.

The conservation commission looks to residents to create conservation easements; the commission should be looking at doing that here. Show the residents that they are not just being asked to make a contribution, but the state is being asked as well.

**Matt Lahey** — Explained the next steps in the process. So far it has been information gathering and getting input from the community. The Study Committee will take the input it has received, come up with what needs to be done for the environmental assessment, and draft 2-3 potential use scenarios for presentation to the commission and possibly the public in October.

**Tom Goulette**, Belknap County resident — Works for LRCC and commented that the graphics and electrical programs were sited at the Lakes Region Facility, so the college has been there for years. It is virtually impossible for one entity to move in and use all the buildings on the property.

There are three priorities that came out of the process from 1990's:

1. Education
2. Economic Development
3. Recreation

Additionally, Mr. Goulette talked about the K-16 approach to education. This process will guide students into attending the community college and earning a Bachelor's degree. A lot of students leave the state for education and do not return. There is a need to keep students in the state. Plymouth State College was interested in moving some programming to LRCC. There are no Bachelor's programs in Laconia and by bringing them on the campus this would create the opportunity for community college students to further their education and finish their programs.

Business Incubators – The states of North Carolina and Georgia have done a great a job partnering Community Colleges and Universities with business incubators. LRCC does not have space to do programs like this. The Lakes Region Facility space would give the community college the opportunity to look at these programs again.

Agriculture – The community college looked at horticulture as a program for the college; currently, the only such program in Southern New Hampshire is at the Thompson School. There is a need for additional agriculture educational programming in the area.

The community college also has an energy program, which is the only such program in the state. They have been asked by the Department of Energy to be a demonstration site for energy efficiency. Mr. Goulette commented that although this is an exciting opportunity, they do not have the space.

**Eileen Cabanel**, Laconia City Manager — Commented that there needs to be some kind of mechanism to safeguard the property as the state is in dire straits (financially) and they are looking to get money any way they can.

She is in favor of the Pease model—setting up a redevelopment authority—so the state can't come in the middle of the night and make all our ideas go up in smoke.

**Chris Callaghan**, Laconia resident — Said that the property is state owned now, so if one of these new uses came to fruition where should the purchase money go? Does the state get it or the city? M. Lahey explained that at this point there is no use that has been given priority. This meeting tonight is to brainstorm and talk through proposed uses. Some of the uses, such as the college, would mean that the property remains in state hands.

**Sally Holder** — The commission should think outside of the box and make it Green. Winnisquam Lake is important, and we need to keep it clean, as well as Lake Opechee. She suggested getting an authority group together and drawing a line on where not to touch. She thought that a private/public partnership could

work, one that offered tax incentives. She said a number of small businesses would be better than one big one.

**Armond Bolduc**, Laconia City Councilor — When the state school was in operation there was a farm that would grow everything they needed and the gardens were marvelous. There were also pigs, sheep, etc. There is the potential to still farm the property and also have another use. He commented that the part of the property that is not fields should be another use.

Farmer Definition: "A man who is outstanding in his field."

**Carol Grasso**, Laconia resident — Commented that there are so many excellent ideas. The thing she is most concerned about is that this process reminded her of what happened 20 years ago, when the site became a prison. Need to make sure that does not happen again because the property can really be an economic engine. These are all great things that people have mentioned, but we need to protect this property.

**Adam Hosmer**, Laconia resident — Expressed how important this land is to him as a father and a business owner. It is a transformative opportunity. He asked that the Commission please continue to have these discussions with the residents of Laconia.

**Jane Wood**, Laconia resident — Thinks that the agricultural reuse would be an easier way to get started as it is known that the soil is wonderful and less likely to have brownfields-related problems. This would be a good place to get started before moving forward with other reuse options. She also suggested a dog park as a potential use.