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Assisted living, Alzheimer's facility may anchor development at old prison site

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THOMASTON (March 5): The Thomaston Redevelopment Committee has approved a proposal for a \$15 million mixed-income assisted living and Alzheimer's facility to anchor development at the former Maine State Prison site.

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The proposed 35,000-square-foot assisted living facility and 15,000-square-foot Alzheimer's housing would be located at the western border of the 15.6-acre property, according to Thomaston Town Manager Valmore Blastow Jr. on Wednesday, and would use 4 to 5 acres of the land.



This is a rendition of the proposed assisted living and Alzheimer's facility that is being planned for the former Maine State Prison property in Thomaston. (Image courtesy of Bethanis Associates)

"We need something large enough to start development," he said.

The overall plan for the property, now owned by the town, includes a YMCA, retail and medical clinic components, as well as multifamily residential housing.

As an example, Blastow said the multifamily housing aspect could be condominiums.

The committee met Tuesday night with Developers Collaborative that included developers Richard Berman, Jim Hatch and Kevin Bunker. Craig Freshley of Good Group Decisions of Brunswick served as a facilitator.



This is an image of the site plan for the former Maine State Prison property. Looking toward Route 1, the assisted living facility is on the left; the condos are on the lower right, retail is along Route 1 on the left side, and a community center is between the retail and the condos. A park is in the middle bottom and a trail runs along the river. (Image courtesy of Developers Collaborative)

The establishment of a tax increment financing district, or TIF, for the project would allow the town to set aside tax money specifically to do public infrastructure improvements to the property, such as roads, trails, open space, sidewalks, sewer and water, Blastow said.

The TIF has the possibility of generating \$150,000 annually for infrastructure improvements and \$100,000 per year in new tax dollars for the general fund, according to some preliminary figures that Blastow had not yet reviewed.

Developer Lon Walters of Hallowell, who has proposed the facility, owns similar ones in Hallowell, Waterville and Brewer, according to Blastow. The facility is supported through private and MaineCare funding, he said.

The residential care piece of the proposal indicates 50 to 60 beds, Blastow said, and 30 Alzheimer's beds. There are 75 parking spaces in the plan.

"It's one building, but it's all interconnected," he said.

The architect for the project is Peter Bethanis of Kents Hill.

"The first [architect's] rendition goes to the heart of looking Colonial," Blastow said, describing the facility as a one-story Colonial cape design that has some portions with four stories as the building contours to the land.

According to Bunker on Wednesday, the facility would not only add tax dollars, it would also create 75 new jobs.

"It was kind of a watershed moment," Bunker said when the committee voted in favor of the proposal. "Everyone was excited."

Some members had other ideas for the property, he said, which just didn't happen because of the economy.

The committee voted to approve the plan as presented with a few changes as follows:

- Shorten the residential care facility by as much as possible.
- Consider expanding the YMCA component to include a pool.
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Provide ability (physically and legally) for a through road (roughly parallel to Route 1, along the west and south side of the site) in the future.

- Improve the detailed appearance toward Route 1.

The next step is a public hearing with the board of selectmen regarding zoning and the master plan, said Blastow. That public hearing will be April 14. Those matters would be voted on by referendum at the June 10 elections.

Blastow did not yet know if the TIF would be decided at the June 10 polls or at the June town meeting.

Blastow credited John Delvecchio of the Maine State Planning Office for all his work with the committee on the project.

"He's worked tirelessly [for the town] on this project," Blastow said, also praising committee members Bill Hahn and Ed Ludwig for their efforts.

In his opinion, Blastow said, "This is a model of the great American neighborhood. It has that element."

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