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## Government

# Voters approve Thomaston Green TIF district

By Daniel Dunkle  
Business/Associate Editor

THOMASTON (Feb 11): Voters at the Feb. 10 special town meeting in Thomaston approved creating a tax increment financing district that will encompass the former Maine State Prison property and a strip of Route 1 that includes the downtown business district and Thomaston Academy.

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About 25 residents attended the special town meeting and public hearing Feb. 10 at Watts Hall. Town officials fielded questions and heard comments from the public on the proposal. Noreen Norton of Eaton Peabody Consulting Group, LLC and Jim Hatch of Berman Associates in Portland also helped answer questions.



Dwight Henry of Thomaston argues that important decisions should not be made in special town meetings where there is a smaller turnout than at a regular town meeting. (Photo by Daniel Dunkle)

Town officials said establishing the Thomaston Green Downtown Revitalization Tax Increment Financing District would help pay for the public infrastructure improvements needed to develop the former Maine State Prison property. In addition, they argued it would shelter the town from suffering cuts in state aid to education as that property is developed and the town's value increases.



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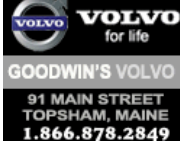


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Town Manager Valmore Blastow answers questions about the tax increment financing district proposal at the Feb. 10 town meeting. (Photo by Daniel Dunkle)

Hatch said the TIF district was needed to attract private developers to the prison property and to put the infrastructure improvements in place to pave the way for that development.

"It's totally not feasible without it," Hatch said of the town's plans for the prison property.



Mike Mayo of Thomaston is sworn in as the moderator at a special town meeting Feb. 10. (Photo by Daniel Dunkle)

The 30-year TIF district will capture 70 percent of the new tax revenues from the Thomaston Green redevelopment and new improvements or developments in the downtown and reinvest that money into projects to improve the district.

The other 30 percent of new taxes generated in the district will go to the town's general fund, just as property taxes from any other property do.

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Noreen Norton of Eaton Peabody Consulting Group explains the features of the tax increment financing district proposal to those attending the special town meeting Feb. 10 at Watts Hall. (Photo by Daniel Dunkle)

They projected that development of the former prison property would generate a new assessed value of \$12.3 million and that would create \$5.1 million in new taxes over 30 years. Under the TIF plan, \$1.5 million of that goes into the town's general fund and \$3.6 million is generated for TIF improvements.

In addition, they estimate that \$2.6 million in new value will be sheltered from the state's calculations when it comes to providing the town with school and other aid. The speakers explained that when a town gains new value, the state believes the town has more money and therefore needs less state money.

Norton said that is \$2.6 million the town will not have to come up with out of its own budget.

The TIF district will not provide a tax break to businesses or developers in the area who improve their buildings or add value to them. They will still have to pay the same amount in assessed taxes and their assessments will increase appropriately as their property value increases. The TIF district only changes how those tax dollars are handled.

The TIF revenues will likely be used to provide water and sewer service, site work, access roads, and parking to the former state prison property. That in turn will support redevelopment of the property.

In the village, town leaders have proposed improvements to Watts Hall to facilitate sale of up to five storefront retail condominium units. This may mean moving the town office and the police station to another site, Town Manager Valmore Blastow said.

It could also pay for improvements to Main Street sidewalks in the district.

Hatch argued that it is hard to attract developers to the former prison property without the

TIF in place. He said developers do not want to deal with uncertainty or face the possibility of months of delay waiting for public hearings and town meeting approvals.

However, Dwight Henry argued at the public hearing that there were too few people in attendance to make such a big decision for the rest of the town. He said low turnout was the reason he doesn't like special town meetings.

"We're going to do this tonight with 20 people here, and make a commitment for 30 years with people who aren't going to be here in 30 years," he said. "It's not a good turnout, making a big decision for a very ambitious plan."

Town officials said the deadline for TIF applications to the state is March 1.

Voters also approved a \$221,000 Community Development Block Grant program to be submitted to the Department of Economic and Community Development and authorized municipal officers to accept grant funds.

Residents also voted to allow selectmen to negotiate the sale of development land to St. George Cove LLC in the Thomaston Green Redevelopment Project as outlined in the master plan approved at the June 16 town meeting and to retain the public areas consistent with the agreement with St. George Cove LLC.

Residents also approved an amendment to the comprehensive plan and approved amendments to the town sewer ordinance.






At the beginning of the town meeting, a moment of silence was observed in memory of former Selectman Walter Breen.

Mike Mayo was chosen as moderator of the meeting.

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