

Shipyard players on the same page

By Carol Britton Meyer
GateHouse News Service

Thu Sep 13, 2007, 01:52 PM EDT



From left, Leslie Cohen of Samuels & Associates; Jed Lowry of Lennar Urban Northeast; and Howard Hirsch of SeaChain Marine at the Hingham Shipyard on Monday.

Hingham -

The key players in the redevelopment of the Hingham Shipyard share the same vision of making the waterfront more accessible to the public, an enthusiasm for the overall plan, and a desire to preserve the site's rich history.

The property lay virtually dormant for many years after its heyday in World War II. Soon it will be thriving again. Now that the old buildings have been torn down, the spaciousness of the site is apparent.

One of the special features will be a public walkway along the waterfront, with landscaped piers and spectacular views of the water.

"Nowhere else offers a waterfront park, marina, shopping, dining, and living all at one location," said Jed Lowry, Director of Asset Management for Lennar Urban Northeast. Lennar is constructing 150 manor houses and townhouses on the eastern portion of the site. "It's a very unique project."

Much of the infrastructure has been installed and some foundations have been laid. By next March or April,

buildings will start springing up, bringing the project to life.

The first step in moving the project forward was taking down the giant view-blocking and deteriorating General Services Administration building. The redevelopment plan features view corridors and an abundance of green space.

Community excitement is mounting, because in the not too distant future, the actual buildings will start going up and the project will begin taking shape before the public eye.

"The property changes personalities as you move into the site," said Howard Hirsch, whose family owns the Hingham Shipyard Marinas. "It goes from active retail to quiet residential to the sanctuary of the adjacent Bouve property."

Hirsch has had a bird's-eye view of the overall project from the outset because the marinas have continued to operate throughout the long approval process. "A lot of visitors have been asking about the overall project and looking for information," he said. "There has been a lot of interest among walk-ins."

In 1995, Hirsch's uncle and aunt, Jane and Mark Hirsch, partnered with developer Paul Trendowicz to purchase the entire 130-acre site, forming Sea Chain, LLC. A master plan was developed centering around their shared vision, which included making the waterfront more accessible to the general public and commemorating the Shipyard's history.

Since last summer, when Samuels & Associates, Inc., introduced a conceptual modification to the original Shipyard redevelopment plan calling for a cinema,

more restaurants, and other changes, the developers have secured the necessary approvals to move forward with the project. Over the summer, the project moved from the planning to the "doing" stage, with the marketing aspect now underway.

The targeted "audience" is the 22,000 residents of Hingham; the 300,000 South Shore residents living within a 20-minute drive of the site; more than 2,000 ferry commuters each weekday; seasonal residents and boaters who use more than 6,000 boat slips in the greater Hingham area; tourists from the entire region; and 85,000 daytime workers who are within a 15-minute drive.

Lifestyle center

Samuels is creating a mixed-use lifestyle center with a "village" feel on 27.5 acres. In addition to the Lennar town homes, Avalon Bay is building 250 rental units adjacent to the new commuter boat lot.

SeaChain, LLC, which obtained the master permits needed to move forward with the development, recently finalized agreements with these other real estate developers, who now own separate parcels within the redevelopment area.

SeaChain will continue to operate, making minor improvements to its marina at its current location. The marine service uses are moving to another location across the harbor.

The Hirsch family marinas, consisting of Hewitt's Cove and Landfall, have undergone or are undergoing major improvements.

The new Shipyard Drive loop, which should be completed by next summer, was designed as part of a roadway system that will provide better site access and egress with two fully signalized intersections and five traffic lanes instead of the current one lane. The existing entrance will be supplemented by an additional entrance/exit across from the Talbot's complex and next to Eastern Yacht.

Good communication is key to bringing the plan to fruition. "All of the developers are in close contact," Cohen said. "We meet on a weekly basis for construction updates and to talk about marketing and permitting issues." "We're all kind of joined at the hip," Lowry quipped.

The focus on the history of the Shipyard is in keeping with the vision of the Hingham Shipyard Historical Foundation, founded by Mark Hirsh to commemorate the events that took place at the site during World War II and the men and women who were instrumental in building and launching Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) during the conflict.

Final work on the historical interpretations aspects is on going through the input of a working group of Shipyard, Town and former shipyard worker representatives.

Historical panels that create a walking tour along the waterfront will list the names of the ships that were launched from the Shipyard, along with historical information. There will also be metal cutouts of the three types of ships that were built there. Historical panels will be located on the Avalon Bay and Lennar properties as well.

Busy times lie ahead for the developers. "Those passing or visiting the site will start seeing some of our residential buildings going up over the course of the next couple of months," said Lowry. "This will attract a lot of attention, as did the removal of the 1,000-foot GSA building. People will start seeing homes going up."

Town homes

Lennar is building 150 town homes in 28 buildings and a clubhouse. "Thirty-three

will be right on the waterfront, and many others will also have great water views," Lowry said. "People are excited to see the vision that is being created here. There's a real community feel, with park space interspersed that will bring the site to life." Lennar recently opened a sales office in downtown Hingham so people can see for themselves what "Waterscape" will look like. The first residents are expected to move in next summer.

"There has been a lot of interest among South Shore residents — people who pass by the site or who have moved away and heard about this development," Lowry said. "It's an ideal location — just 35 minutes from here to Boston on the commuter boat. You don't even have to get on the highway to travel to work or to the Aquarium."

The 1.2 million-square-foot mixed-use Samuels project is also picking up speed. "Some foundations will be going in this Fall," said Samuels Vice President of Development Leslie Cohen. Vertical construction will begin next Spring. The development also includes 94 luxury residential condominiums located above the bustling main street. A Spring 2009 grand opening is planned.

"It's exciting seeing things take shape," Cohen said. "We've been talking with a lot of interested parties. There has been a great deal of restaurant interest associated with the cinema use and based on the pedestrian plaza leading to the water and the outdoor dining component. This will all add up to a high-energy waterfront development."

Samuels takes a scale model of its mixed-use development on the road to help prospective tenants grasp what the Shipyard will look like at full build-out. "We've brought the model to many International Council of Shopping Center Conventions," Cohen said. "It's a great tool showing how the project will come to life."

The Launch at Hingham Shipyard is designed to provide a one-stop experience that could include shopping, dining, taking in a movie, enjoying the ocean views, taking a stroll, or any of a number of combinations.

New marina

The Hingham Shipyard Marinas office building on the waterfront, which features a bathhouse and some retail space, will be finished within the next several months. "This was the first building constructed and open on the site. It's the one building people can see already," noted Hirsh with a smile. "Everyone is excited about having the whole area opened up. The site has so much to offer customers and visitors versus what has been here for so many years."

In the face of competition from the newly opened Derby Street Shoppes and other shopping areas, a conceptual modification to the original Shipyard redevelopment plan was presented to the town by Samuels in the summer of 2007.

Besides adding a theater and more restaurants, changes included moving some of the retail space from its prior location adjacent to a parking lot to a more prime location; relocating some of the residential units away from the street, and more recently, further from the waterfront; and moving some of the office space away from Rte. 3A and closer to the village center.

"The cinema was one way to differentiate our project from others that were being built," Cohen said. "Adding a cinema extends a customer's stay and makes it more than just a place to shop — a lifestyle center that maintains its vibrancy into the evening hours and the weekend.."

The Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals approved the new site plan in May. Changes made to the Samuels plan throughout the process reflected town board and community input and resulted in a better project in the eyes of both the developer and town officials who reviewed the conceptual modification to the originally approved plan.

"We spent many hours in working groups and at public hearings to get through the enormity of this project and all of the details," Cohen said. She praised the numerous volunteer board members who spent many hours reviewing the plans, asking questions, expressing their concerns, and making

recommendations to come up with the “best project possible.”
Hingham Shipyard plan at a glance

- Size of entire property: 130 acres
 - Project overview: A mix of residential, retail, and public open space, including a waterfront park and walking paths; 500 residential units; and improved commuter boat and marina facilities. The Shipyard’s rich history will be reflected in the project.
- Key players:

- Samuels & Associates, Inc.’s vision is to create a mixed-use “village” on 27.5 acres, including a six-screen, 1,000 -seat movie theater framed by a courtyard, ice cream shop, cafes, and park. The development will also feature retail stores, restaurants, some residential units, offices, a courtyard, green space, a health club, day care center, and other amenities. For more information, visit www.hinghamlaunch.com.

A conceptual modification to the original Shipyard redevelopment plan was presented in the summer of 2007. Besides the theater, changes include more restaurants (ranging from ice cream shops and cafes to sit-down restaurants); moving some of the retail space from its prior location adjacent to a parking lot to a more prime location; relocating some of the residential units away from the street and more recently, further from the waterfront; and moving some of the office space away from Rte. 3A and closer to the village center.

The Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals held joint hearings about Samuels’ recently revised and ultimately approved plan, which is based in large part on town board and community input. Approval in the form of a Special Permit was required because the latest proposal was different from the original approved filing.

- Avalon Bay plans to build 250 rental units adjacent to the commuter lot and retail portion of the project.
- Lennar Urban Northeast will build about 150 manor houses and townhouses on the eastern portion of the site. Visit www.waterscapehingham.com.

- The Hirsh family owns and operates the Hingham Shipyard Marinas, consisting of Hewitt’s Cove and Landfall, both of which have undergone or are undergoing major improvements. For further information, visit www.hinghamshipyardmarinas.com.

- SeaChain, LLC, which previously owned the entire property and obtained the master permits needed to move forward with the development, recently finalized agreements with these three other real estate developers who now own separate parcels within the redevelopment area.

SeaChain will continue to operate, making minor improvements to its marina at its current location. The marine service uses are moving to another location across the harbor.

For further information, visit www.thehinghamshipyard.com, which lists construction updates for the entire site.