

B**South**

Westwood to vote on bid to revitalize Islington



MCKAY ARCHITECTS

A view from above of Islington Center in Westwood. A developer's plan to revamp part of this business area will go before Westwood Town Meeting on May 30.

By Johanna Seltz

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 25, 2018

WESTWOOD — This prosperous town of about 15,000 has two downtowns: the big one on High Street with the Town Hall and the main post office and library — and tiny Islington Center, with a branch library, shops, a preschool, and a busy baseball field packed into a few blocks.

On May 30, voters at Town Meeting will decide whether to approve steps that would lead to major changes in Islington Center through a multimillion-dollar public-private development project that would bring new shops and housing to the center, as well as more parking and a renovated library and community center.

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Center.



SUPREME DEVELOPMENT

A rendering of what Islington Center would look like under the redevelopment plan being presented to Westwood Town Meeting.

“It’s been a longstanding plan for the town to upgrade both of its town centers, so this is a particularly well-timed

opportunity to do just that in Islington,” said Town Administrator Michael Jaillet. “We just hope people come out to Town Meeting and express their opinion. We need two-thirds of the vote to approve this.”

While town officials — including selectmen and members of the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Finance Committee — have embraced the final plan developed over the past two years, there is some opposition from neighbors who worry the project would exacerbate traffic problems in Islington Center.

“We would love more restaurants and things to enjoy, but we have big concerns about parking and traffic and our kids’ safety,” said Nayla Daly, who lives nearby and thinks the project is being rushed through.

“I just don’t have a good feeling about it,” said Peggy MacInnes, a lifelong resident of Westwood who is particularly upset that the iconic church building would be razed. “The volume and stature of this project don’t feel like the little-town feeling we have down there. It’s not the proper place for a development of this size.”

But David Atkins, who lives about a quarter-mile from Islington Center and is a member of the Planning Board — which placed 50 conditions on its approval of a special permit for the project last month — said he’s confident the final design works well for the area.

For example, the new mixed-use building would preserve “the iconic architecture of the church,” and the project would provide “enhanced community space that will better serve the neighborhood through new or renovated buildings for the library, community center, and preschool,” he said in an e-mail.

“Many residents raised valid concerns about the size and scale of the project, and I believe the developer adjusted the plans to create a project that fits the village character of Islington and supports the economic development necessary for the village to continue to thrive,” Atkins said.



PEGGY ROSE

Giorgio Petruzziello.

The developer, Giorgio Petruzziello of Petruzziello Properties in Dedham, bought five buildings in Islington Center four years ago and jumped at the opportunity to add more when

the town asked for development proposals in the spring of 2016.

“The whole center needs updating; it’s tired,” Petruzziello said. “I look at this project as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to revitalize Islington Center. I don’t want this to be missed — by me, or the town. If this project happens, it will be a huge economic boon.”

He said he plans to spend “north of \$35 million” on the total project.

Petruzziello said he understands the neighbors’ concerns about parking and traffic, but outside consultants have said parking is adequate and the impact on traffic would be minimal.

“We have to go with what the professionals tell us,” he said.

He said the project’s scale isn’t overwhelming. He pointed out that the replica of the old church building that now houses the Islington Community Center, which would be built if the plan is approved, would be “three feet lower than what exists today.”

Town officials estimate the development would generate \$400,000 annually in local tax income. Plus, the addition of an affordable-housing unit in an existing apartment building would allow the town, through the complexities of state affordable-housing formulas, to add 12 units to its inventory of affordable housing and help maintain the threshold that prevents developers from submitting “unfriendly” Chapter 40B projects.

“Change in any part of town always raises concerns,” the Finance Committee wrote in its explanation of why it supports the three Town Meeting articles that would allow the project to move forward. But, the committee concluded, the benefits of this project would outweigh those concerns.

Each of the three Town Meeting articles requires a two-thirds vote to pass, and approval of each is necessary for the project to advance.

Voters are asked to decide whether to allow the town to swap property with the developer, to borrow money to rebuild the branch library, and to expand the boundary of the business

zone and overlay district to allow commercial development on two currently residential lots.

If Town Meeting approves all three measures, the project would proceed in three steps, according to Nora Loughnane, the town's director of community and economic development.

In the first phase, she said, the town would transfer property it owns on the west side of Washington Street to the developer, who would build a new CVS and municipal parking lot. The developer would give the town \$400,000 to design the renovation and expansion of Wentworth Hall for the Islington Branch Library, the town's Youth and Family Services Office, and some town recreation programs now housed in the nearby Islington Community Center.

In the second phase, the developer would give the town another \$400,000 to move Wentworth Hall across the street, and work on that building would proceed. The developer also would renovate its current CVS and create new space for the popular Mother's Morning Out preschool.

In the third phase, the town would sell the former church building to the developer for \$1.4 million. The developer would demolish the building and replace it with one similar in style but containing 18 two-bedroom condominiums, underground parking, and commercial space on the first floor.

“It’s a complicated proposal that has been in the works for several years now,” Loughnane said.

Town Meeting is scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m. on May 30 at Westwood High School.



LUKE DENT

This former church in Westwood's Islington section would be razed, and a new look-alike building put up by the developer under a plan being voted on by Westwood Town Meeting on May 30.



LUKE DENT

The former Blue Hart Tavern, also known as the Jeremiah Dean House, believed to have been constructed in 1741, would be rehabbed under a redevelopment plan for Islington Center.



LUKE DENT

Islington Center is already looking refreshed with this new fire station completed by the town.

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