

# Sites offer

# myriad options

■ A development consultant offers a range of possibilities for the Searles/Bryant complex and Log Homes parcel.

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GREAT BARRINGTON — Market-rate condominiums, retail spaces, offices and a restaurant were among the recommendations made to the town as potential uses for the now-vacant Searles/Bryant complex and the long-vacant New England Log Homes site.

The two sites are only a few hundred yards apart on Bridge Street, and although there were no direct suggestions to market them together or separately, consultant Edward C. "Ted" Carman Jr. suggested that the town could move fairly quickly on the Searles/Bryant site, while the remediation and wetlands issues on the New England Log Homes site might require a more elongated time frame.

Carman is president of Concord Square Development Co. Inc. of Boston, a development and planning consulting firm. Last night his presentation was couched in theoretical terms, as the town must solicit requests for proposals, or RFPs, from developers before anything moves forward. No decisions were made.

## A consensus is crucial

Carman gave about two dozen residents and town officials some idea of what to expect. He pointed out that the Bridge Street area is a "wonderful location," and that both sites are close to the downtown area.

He also stressed the importance of the town coming to a consensus on what it is looking for in each site, enable it to advocate for whatever state approvals may be needed.

The Searles School complex, for example, could be used for office space on the ground and basement floors and for market-rate condominiums on the second floor.

He suggested that office space also might be appropriate for the former Bryant School. The Alphonso gym could accommodate a retail operation and, possibly, office space.

## 'Best plan for success'

This judgment, based on a survey conducted by his firm, indicated that such space represented the greatest need in the downtown area.

He said the complex would require little, if any, new construction.

One point Carman emphasized, particularly with the Searles/Bryant space, is that the town may get some handsome development plans for it.

"But I think it's best to look at whomever has

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the best plan for success there, not necessarily the best price," he said.

The New England Log Homes site has potential for a more varied municipal menu, Carman said. The principal stumbling blocks are well-known: capping the property, which could run into millions of dollars, and getting a waiver to create compensatory storage from the state.

The site is mostly in a wetland, and there is no real space to create compensatory storage on the site. But Carman said that, "in the long run," something probably could work out with the state.

This site, although facing cleanup issues, already has a potential tenant. The Co-Op Market, now located up the street, has expressed interest in leasing

space for a 12,000-foot store and restaurant.

Besides the co-op building, Carman proposed a second building with retail space on the bottom floor and office space on the upper floors. In addition, he suggested that the town also might seek a 40-unit affordable-housing complex near the rear of the parcel.

"With landscaping, this could be a terrific site," he said.

Another issue at the log homes site, said Carman, is the odor emanating from the town's wastewater treatment plant, which is behind the site. That, he said, must be addressed in some way. He also suggested that the town might want to repaint the bridge on Bridge Street.

"It's unsightly," he said.