

BLT hearing cut short

More than 250 people pack meeting on proposed waterfront development

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STAMFORD -- More than 250 people pressed into two rooms at the Stamford Government Center on Tuesday night to debate a proposed agreement that would grant rights to waterfront city land to a developer for a new boating facility on Magee Avenue.

But about 40 minutes into the proceedings, the meeting was continued to Aug. 13, after a young member of the U.S. Navy Sea Cadets in attendance had a seizure, resulting in a 911 call.

"In light of what happened tonight, we're going to postpone the meeting," Teresa Dell, chairwoman of the planning board said. Dell said the rescheduled meeting would most likely be held at 7 p.m., at Turn of River Middle School, at 117 Vine Road -- a larger venue that can accommodate the larger crowds.

The Sea Cadet was conscious when he was taken by fire department personnel to Stamford Hospital. No further information about his identity or condition was available Tuesday night.

Before the medical emergency -- and after an hour delay to accommodate the overflow audience -- officials from the city and from Harbor Point developer Building and Land Technology fielded questions about the proposed development.

BLT's plan is to construct a \$750 million, 850,000-square-foot campus for the hedge fund Bridgewater Associates on the Bateman Way parcel, where BLT closed and demolished a 251-slip boatyard called Brewer's Yacht Haven.

Under the proposed license agreement, BLT would get the rights to use 2.5 acres of city land as part of a 6-acre boatyard on Magee Avenue that the developer would operate. BLT would also take over the nearby Czescik Marina in exchange for \$5 million toward the construction of a new animal shelter and necessary maintenance and upgrades to Czescik and Kosciuszko parks.

John Freeman, general counsel and spokesman for BLT, said that the Magee Avenue boatyard and the proposal to build Bridgewater Associates' headquarters are important next steps in revitalizing the city's waterfront.

"The vision to transform Stamford's waterfront was here before we began, but we've continued it," Freeman said. "Bridgewater would be a great start to our next phase, allowing us to have a great economic impact on the city and still build the city a state-of-the art boatyard."

Maureen Boylan, an organizer for Save Our Boatyard, which has demanded a new boatyard on the site of the demolished one, said that the license agreement, which is supported by Stamford Mayor Michael Pavia, is illegal because the land as parkland.

To get the waterfront access needed to operate a boatyard with valet rack service for 184 boaters at 205 Magee Avenue, BLT must gain access to a narrow strip of city land.

"The mayor and city legal counsel don't have the right to grant an easement....," Boylan said. "This is about protecting what is rightfully belongs to the taxpayer and not just the boaters."

During the abbreviated question-and-answer period, Stamford Economic Development Director Laure Aubuchon said the \$5 million in proposed improvements to be provided by BLT would be about one-third higher than the appraised value of the land involved in the license agreement.

"We believe \$5 million will buy a great deal of improvements to things that would not be possible without that investment," Aubuchon said.

Teresa Dell, chairwoman of the planning board, and board member Dudley Williams told Aubuchon they believed the agreement should probably require BLT to cover the total cost of building the animal shelter and making improvements to Czescik Marina even if those costs exceed \$5 million.

"I think this \$5 million figure is minimal, and should be raised to \$10 million or \$15 million to cover the full cost, if that is the cost," Dell said.

Robert Preli, a North Stamford resident and member of the Halloween Yacht Club, said the underlying plan to build a 6-acre boatyard at 205 Magee Avenue could not provide a serviceable boating facility, because the channel could not accommodate the vessel traffic.

"I don't think the Magee waterfront is well suited to a boatyard, and the channel already has too much traffic," Preli said before the hearing. " ...I think BLT should follow the rules, and if the original regulations say it should be a boatyard, there should be a boatyard on Bateman Way."