

## Growth' part of Shipyard plans

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**T**he developer of the western portion of the former Hingham Shipyard has a vision of creating a village, anchored by a waterfront park, an eight-screen movie theater, and a few larger retail stores.

A conceptual modification to the original Shipyard redevelopment plan was recently presented separately to the selectmen and Planning Board.

"This is a multi-purpose center to which people will want to return again and again," said Joel Sklar of Samuels & Associates, Inc., of Boston.

Samuels is a real estate management and development firm with plans to transform 27.5 acres of the Shipyard property into a transit-oriented premier mixed-use lifestyle center. "This is not being done cookie-cutter style," Sklar said. "This is a more creative, long-term approach - a sustainable development."

This village, patterned after the traditional New England town center, would offer retail stores, restaurants, a movie theater, offices, green space, a courtyard, and other amenities - within easy walking distance of each other and the waterfront. In some cases, residential units will be built above shops.

"Mixed-use developments are more aesthetically pleasing and environmentally better for the land," Sklar said. "You don't have to get into your car to move around the site, because you can walk everywhere." He noted there have been active discussions at the national level about these types of developments, which are driven by developers and city and town planners and are compatible with the "Smart Growth" concept.

Smart Growth centers around where, how, and how much a community wants to grow.

It's also about preserving the environment, enhancing the quality of life, supporting economic competitiveness, and distributing the benefits and burdens of development more fairly.

Smart Growth seeks to accomplish these by encouraging growth in or near existing community centers, transit systems, or other areas with existing water and sewer service and other infrastructure, while at the same time preserving open space, farmland, and water resources.

In the case of the redevelopment of the Shipyard, "there's a strong emphasis on public spaces, including a waterfront park that flows into the streetscape," Sklar said. The project features walkable streets, a feeling of connectedness, shared parking resulting in less asphalt, and more green space.

"This development is about creating a sense of place which grows and adapts to changing trends, evolving in a sort of organic way," Sklar said. "The state is promoting this type of development, centered around commuter boats and feeder buses."

Some town officials are skeptical about the changes presented in the modified plan as well as the scale of the proposed theater complex, but Sklar said the proposed cinema

complex wouldn't be the typical movie megaplex. We're talking about a 1,200-seat 20,000-square-foot theater versus a 60,000-square-foot complex with many more seats at other locations in this area," said Sklar. "This will be different from a mall-type complex, where there is no village mix. There will be smaller cinemas within a larger building."

A courtyard, an ice cream shop, cafes, and a park will frame the theater.

"The cinema will be part of the overall village experience, with upscale surroundings," Sklar said. "It will have a different look and feel from other types of eight-screen cinemas. It takes a cinema to make a village."

The Planning Board was not enthusiastic about the cinema component at a recent hearing but will have an opportunity to review the proposal further at its July 24 meeting, according to Sklar. At that time, the board as well as citizens will have a chance to air their views and concerns. Samuels will show examples of several theaters in other communities that have worked well in village settings and that fit in well with the surrounding architecture.

"We think a cinema is necessary to help create a vibrant setting," Sklar said. "We will be working with town officials and the surrounding neighborhoods, which will be part of this same community with a village feel, to hear what they have to say."

Sklar said the hearing would provide an opportunity for town officials and residents to offer input about the architectural style of the theater and its "feel" and scale.

Patriot Cinemas, which owns Loring Hall, the Cameo Theatre in South Weymouth, and theater complexes in Scituate and Hanover, is interested in managing the Shipyard cinema complex. At a recent hearing, assurances were given that the Scott family, which owns the Patriot Cinemas and has strong ties to Hingham, is dedicated to keeping the Loring Hall Theatre open. In fact, noted Warren Baker, attorney for Patriot Cinemas, at the time, the Loring Hall Theatre works because Patriot Cinemas has other, larger theaters to support it.

"This type of mid-sized cinema complex works well in mixed-use developments," Sklar said. "A cinema becomes an amenity, drawing better restaurants and retailers, who love to be located near a theater."

Sklar noted the theater, shops, and retail stores will attract residents, commuters who find it desirable to stop by the proposed upscale health club spa or to attend a movie after arriving home at one of the Shipyard housing units or stepping off the commuter boat, and visitors.

"There will be lots of activity around the theater," Sklar said. "Patriot Cinemas knows how to operate within a village setting. It's important that the cinema fits in with its surroundings."

Town Administrator Charles Cristello and Selectman John Riley met this week with representatives from Samuels to talk about the new plan, and in particular the cinema component, which raised concerns among board members when the conceptual plan was presented to them recently.

"We want to encourage Samuels to think outside of the box," said Selectman Melissa Tully. "I hope they can come up with something else. I haven't heard anyone [in the community] say they think a cinema is a good idea. What are the other options?"

Cristello gave assurances that Samuels wants to work with the town to come up with a plan that is acceptable to all parties and said that Samuels is scheduled to meet with the Selectmen again in August for further discussion.

Other changes from the original plan include moving some of the retail space from its prior location adjacent to a parking lot to a more prime location and moving some of the residential units away from the street and to the site of the former Bay Club. Some of the office space will be moved away from Rte. 3A and closer to the village center. "We'll be creating better, more accessible views for the public," Sklar said.

A new restaurant will be built by the waterfront near a park and courtyard to better integrate it into the village setting.

More restaurants are also included in the new plan than were proposed in the original, with an increase from 38,000- to 45,000-square-feet allocated to food uses, ranging from ice cream shops and cafes to sit-down restaurants - 10 in all.

"This isn't really that different from what was originally permitted," Sklar said. "We have built upon an already good plan but think some changes are necessary for it to function as a healthy street on a long-term basis. This will be a place for everything from romantic dates to family outings - a place where people can spend a Saturday afternoon with their families, visit a gallery, grab a bite to eat, take a stroll, and see a movie."

A mix of residential, retail, and commercial spaces, public open space, a waterfront park and walking path as well as 500 residential units, improved commuter boat and marina facilities, office space, restaurants, a health club, and a day care center are included in the overall plan to redevelop the 130-acre site. Its history will be reflected in the architecture as well as in other ways.

SeaChain, LLC, which previously owned the entire property and obtained the master permits needed to move forward with the development, recently finalized agreements with 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, which will be moved to another location across the harbor.

Samuels & Associates began as a family-run business in Cleveland, Ohio in the 1960s and remained so until the mid- to late-1990s. The family bought the New England-based Finast (First National Stores) chain in the 1980s, eventually selling it to Royal Ahold, based in the Netherlands, which also owns the Stop and Shop and other chains. The business, based in Boston for a number of years, specializes in both retail and residential developments. Sklar is Samuels' business partner.

"We recognize the trends and wanted to bring expertise from both sides of the table," Sklar said.

Samuels projects range from grocery store-anchored shopping centers and other retail developments to mixed-use urban and suburban projects.

Samuels is also the developer of the "Trilogy" mixed-use project located in the heart of Boston's Fenway neighborhood adjacent to the Back Bay and Longwood Medical Area. The 1-million-square-foot project includes 405 studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom luxury rental units and 171 apartments owned and managed by Harvard University for Harvard Medical students, faculty, and staff. The project features a large open courtyard, professional office space, and street-level retail units, with parking below.