

Testimony for Public Hearing on Contract for DES Building, 9/13/2021 Unknown Agenda Item

The DES building project is a fine example of why city staff should not be allowed to select developers unilaterally when their objects are far different from those of city voters. The winning proposal was selected from 17 by city staff without opportunity for the public to comment or even know what the others were, which was a definite mistake. The city council should apologize to the developer and vote NO on this project, and solicit revised bids in an open process.

Residents facing steep property tax increases this year would nearly all prefer to recover as much as possible of the city's investment in the property, and not face tax increases from the project. Those who believe in the zoning process would not want to exempt a project sold at a giveaway price from zoning regulations that private owners have to meet. The more generous may feel that the city needs to subsidize workforce or homeless housing but not apartments that can never be affordable. The staff's apparent goals were maximizing money to the TIF district although it raises current taxes the most because of the higher number of new children in school without the school district getting any more money, and adding higher-income tenants to shop downtown although it worsens the parking shortage in the South End which was already a concern at the recent parking hearing - I would be surprised if even 10% of residents consider these worth a million-dollar bonus to the developer. A majority of voters in the Ward 4 special election supported candidates who opposed this project.

That brings me to the state highway garage property. If the DES building is an example of how city staff intends to select a developer, the council needs to deauthorize the purchase and let a developer pay for the expenses instead of taxpayers. But rather than build more high-density housing on a contaminated waste site, the city needs an interim zoning ordinance allowing commercial or industrial use only on this site. We don't want a Times Beach here.

- Roy Schweiker, Concord NH