

# Ideas wanted: Northampton forum to tackle Round House downtown lot redevelopment Tuesday

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**The Round House (sic) parking lot, named after the former locomotive roundhouse**

**NORTHAMPTON** — With plans for a controversial hotel at the Round House lot firmly in the rearview mirror, the city is taking an important step Tuesday in the potential development of the key downtown parcel.

A special advisory committee reviewing potential development options for the prominent spot behind Pulaski Park will hold a forum to collect ideas from the public. The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Puchalski Municipal Building.

Representatives from Utile, a Boston urban design firm leading the pre-development study of the site, will make a presentation and lead Tuesday's discussion. Ideas culled from the forum will be incorporated into a list of recommendations that will help Mayor David J. Narkewicz craft a new request for proposals in hopes of spurring development of the site.

In addition to studying market conditions, Utile is examining the city's zoning and the site's previous development effort. The goal is to craft a proposal that will allow the city to meet its many goals for the site, including boosting tax revenue, creating jobs and enhancing the downtown business climate.

If and when the property sells, the \$15,000 fee for Utile's services would be reimbursed to MassDevelopment, the quasi-public state agency that help communities with pre-development technical assistance. The state agency would not oversee the project development as it is doing at Village Hill Northampton.

The City Council earlier this year designated the Round House lot as one of the community's "priority development sites." Under state law, communities that designate specific sites as priorities can take advantage of state assistance, such as that provided by MassDevelopment, and possible grants.

The Round House lot would be added to the state's master list of priority sites.

The property's recent controversial history reached a conclusion last August when the city settled a lawsuit with the Pioneer Valley Hotel Group for \$12,500.

The city selected the hotel group's \$1 bid and plan for a 112-room hotel and parking garage in 2006. The hotel group sued the city in 2010 after former Mayor Clare Higgins declined to extend the deadline for a purchase-and-sale agreement for an eighth time in three years.

The special Ad-Hoc Roundhouse Lot Development Advisory Committee consists of four city councilors and four city residents. The councilors are Paul D. Spector, Owen Freeman-Daniels, Pamela C. Schwartz and Eugene A. Tacy, all members of the Economic Development, Housing and Land Use Committee. Resident members are Julie Cowan, vice president at TD Bank and a member of the Northampton Economic Development Advisory Committee; Peter Frothingham, an architect\* and former member of the Central Business Architecture Committee; Mary Kasper, a retired executive assistant to former mayor Mary Ford and a former co-director of the Northampton Arts Council; and William Turomsha, a contractor and principal at William J. Turomsha Design and Construction.

\* CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story gave an incorrect profession for architect Peter Frothingham.

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