

## **Steven Levesque**

### **Testimony in neither support nor opposition to LD 1637**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Steve Levesque, and I am here to speak neither in support nor opposition to LD 1637 "An Act to Reform the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority", as amended. I'm here today to offer some historical perspective about MRRA, its intended role and its results to date, as well as to express a few general concerns about certain provisions.

The closure of the Brunswick Naval Air Station had a profound effect on the local, regional and state economy. Based on a 2007 analysis by the State Planning Office in 2007, the predicted impacts of the closure of NAS Brunswick included the following:

- The Brunswick LMA was expected to see the loss of upwards of 6,500 jobs and \$140 million of annual income by 2011.
- The State's Gross State Product was predicted to be reduced by nearly \$400 million annually.
- Area employers were predicted to lose approximately 500 military spouses as their employees.
- Approximately 2,300 housing units would be entering the marketplace, which would contribute to an increase in the regional vacancy rate to about 10%.
- The Brunswick area will see a loss of approximately \$14 million in rent and mortgage payments.
- Local public schools will lose 10% of their students and nearly \$1.3 million in federal school aid.

Soon after the closure decision was made in 2005, the State of Maine and the Town of Brunswick established the Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority (BLRA) to begin the process of hiring staff to prepare the Master Reuse Plan for the 3,320-acre main base, and the Town of Topsham established the Topsham Local Redevelopment Authority (TLRA) to prepare the Reuse Master Plan for the 74-acre Annex in the adjacent Town of Topsham. In 2007, the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA) was created to implement both those plans.

As the initial Executive Director of the BLRA, I was actively involved with the conceptualization of the legislation creating MRRA, and managed it through 2021. During that period, the BLRA and TRLA worked with Governor Baldacci's office and the Legislature to determine the best form of governance to effectively address both the resultant economic dislocation issues associated with the closure of the navy base and facilitate its rapid redevelopment. They collectively toured a number of closed military bases in the northeast and solicited the advice of several national base closure experts. One of the key lessons learned during this process, was that redevelopment entities

which were governed by an independent non-political board of directors, were typically more successful in achieving their redevelopment goals.

As a result of this analyses, it was determined that MRRA should be a State-related entity with a regional focus, and governed by an apolitical Board, whose members would be nominated by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. As intended, the Board members were to include both local mid-coast and state-wide citizens, with appropriate business and other key expertise to assist with the redevelopment effort. In addition, a commissioner of one of the State departments was to be on the board, in order to enhance continuity with the State during the redevelopment effort. The Legislature would assign an oversight committee for MRRA, which is now the H&ED Committee. It should be noted that this structure has many similarities to the Loring Development Authority statute.

As we approach the 20-year mark of MRRA's creation, it's always good legislative governance to review the performance of MRRA in meeting its legislative intent and the goals and vision of the reuse master plan. So how has MRRA performed?

In a relatively short period of time, the redevelopment of the Brunswick Naval Air station has been recognized as one of the most successful military reuse efforts in the country and we created a vibrant live work and play community, that is the envy of the nation. Since its closure in 2011, MRRA has led the economic recovery of the former base and has eclipsed the metric where the economic impact of the revitalization effort has exceeded the impact of the former active military installation. Here are a few stats on key metrics to date:

- ✓ There are now over 2,500 people employed at Brunswick Landing and the Topsham Commerce Park, many in great growth sectors for Maine. Using a conservative economic multiplier, this results in over 7,500 new jobs in the mid-coast region and the State.
- ✓ Over 1,500 new housing units have been created to support the area's workforce, in addition to the existing 750 units left by the Navy.
- ✓ The Brunswick Executive Airport now supports over 25,000 annual operations for essential flight training, aircraft repair and maintenance and general aviation. BXM has been recognized in the State Aviation System Plan as the highest rated economic contributor of any general aviation airport in the state (\$22 million annually), and unlike most airports in Maine, BXM is operating in the black. It is also the headquarters of the Maine Space Corporation, supporting the needs of the growing space industry.
- ✓ The Brunswick Landing campus is home to several educational facilities, providing essential training for our future workforce, including: Southern Maine Community College; University of Maine, Augusta (aviation programs), Maine Maritime Academy, and a Bath Iron Works training facility.

- ✓ The redevelopment effort has attracted over \$1 billion in private sector investments and generates over \$6.5 million annually in tax revenues for the towns of Brunswick and Topsham.

I would add that environmental stewardship of the properties inherited by the Navy always has been a central ethos of MRRA in this remarkable redevelopment effort. MRRA was given the challenging responsibility of redeveloping a former military installation, which contains over 23 national superfund sites, from the Navy's 70-year ownership. Dealing with these issues involves associated complex management activities, involving multiple partners, including the Navy, EPA, DEP, the Town of Brunswick. Obviously, dealing with the emerging PFAS issues have added additional complexities, which are being effectively managed by this team. For your additional information, I've attached a document from MRRA's website, which details these ongoing stewardship and environmental management activities.

In summary, the governance structure of MRRA, as envisioned and created by the Legislature in 2007, is working quite well to support the effective redevelopment of the former base.

While it can be productive to review and calibrate enabling legislation of State entities to reflect current trends, I would caution against breaking what works, just for the sake of change. (If it's not broke, why fix it). With that said, I have two primary concerns with this bill:

1. The provisions of appointing future Trustees appears very confusing and is much different than the current process of Governor nominations, followed by legislative committee hearings and confirmation by the Senate. You may want to ask your legal team if the proposed provisions allowing direct legislative and Town appointments to the Board would conflict with the State Constitution and the defined separation of powers; and
2. The bill now inserts elected officials directly into the redevelopment process, which has been problematic across the country.

I'm happy to answer any questions.

## ***Attachment A***

### ***Environmental Stewardship at Brunswick Landing***

Strong and robust Environmental Stewardship is a key element to the successful redevelopment of the former Brunswick Naval Air Station. The overall guiding principles of environmental stewardship at Brunswick Landing are dictated by the Reuse Master Plan for the former Naval Air Station properties. It outlines the overall direction and principles associated with being good stewards of the lands and resources that MRRA manages. It is a dynamic document that looks strategically at the land MRRA controls. These environmental stewardship principles, are further illustrated, implemented and managed by a number of other specific plans, permits, deeds and guidance documents, including:

- The federal Environmental Impact Statement completed for the Reuse Master Plan;
- Brunswick Landing Natural Resources Management Plan;
- Brunswick Executive Airport Master Plan;
- Maine DEP Multi-Sector General Permit and associated Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan for the Brunswick Executive Airport;
- Brunswick Landing Design Guidelines;
- Federal Property conveyance documents and deeds, with associated land use restrictions and controls;
- Uniform Environmental Covenant Agreements, as applicable;
- Town of Brunswick zoning ordinance; and
- other applicable local, state and federal regulatory permits and directives.

In addition to the specific plans and programmatic activities described above, MRRA works with the Navy, the Maine DEP, the US EPA, the Restoration Advisory Board and the Town of Brunswick on ongoing environmental management issues on Brunswick Landing, including, but not limited to:

- Monitoring of on-going environmental remediation and remedial investigation activities, including groundwater and surface water testing; and
- Conducting annual surveys (led by the Navy) of every property owner at Brunswick Landing where there is a land use control in place to determine if the property owner is in compliance with land use controls for that property, and has disturbed any soil, and provided proper notice to the Navy, the Town and/or DEP, or identified any previously unknown contaminant on the property. MRRA itself provides this documentation on seventy-two parcels.