


Yard South developer withdraws controversial plan in South Portland

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SOUTH PORTLAND — The developer of Yard South, a controversial mixed-use proposal to redevelop the city's former World War II shipyard property, has withdrawn its rezoning request amid organized opposition from residents.

Jennifer Packard, president of PK Realty Management, said her team withdrew its application Monday for a zone change that would have allowed housing to be built on the 30-acre industrial property that rims Portland Harbor.



Jennifer Packard, principal of PK Realty Management, and her brother David Packard, chief counsel of the company, stand in the former shipyard property in South Portland in 2021. PK Realty paid \$7.7 million for the 30-acre industrial property in 2018. *Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer*

PK Realty had submitted a rezoning request in July for a proposal that would have added about 1,000 residential units, including 100 subsidized, a waterfront park and other community amenities within 15 to 20 years.

“It’s just become really apparent that the city doesn’t have a process in place to manage a project of this scope and scale,” Packard said Monday. “It’s a systemic issue and it exists across Maine.”

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Packard said her team remains committed to addressing the housing crisis going forward and is pursuing other options, but she wasn't ready to talk about next steps yet.

Without knowing PK Realty's next move, opponents of the project were reserved in their reaction.

"We are cautiously optimistic, but we don't know exactly what it means," said Cathy Chapman, a leader of the citizens group No Yard South.

"We're not opposed to development there, but we would prefer marine or waterfront development," Chapman said Monday.

With rising sea levels and huge petroleum storage tanks nearby, the property isn't appropriate for housing of any kind, she said.

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“We’re not suspending our campaign,” Chapman said.

“We’ve already collected over 1,200 signatures against Yard South and we will continue.”

Packard said organized public opposition to projects like Yard South, including lawn signs scattered throughout the city, is only one of many factors that make it difficult to develop housing.

“We don’t feel particularly special,” she said. “The housing crisis and the reasons for it are endemic across the U.S.”

PK Realty paid \$7.7 million for the former shipyard land in 2018, buying it from the Cacoulidis family that had been trying to redevelop the property for two decades.

At the outset, Packard said Yard South would be developed as an environmentally sustainable project in a transparent way with community input.

Packard said her team sought the zoning change at the urging of municipal officials who encouraged them to pursue a vision for the property that’s outlined in the city’s comprehensive plan and calls for adding residential uses in the shipyard zone.

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Packard's team withdrew the application because "despite housing being a primary City Council goal, there is a lack of leadership and no shared plan or vision to carry out this objective."

Mayor Misha Pride said both PK Realty and No Yard South recently asked to meet with the council to discuss the proposal before it was reviewed by the planning board.

He said the council declined both requests because Planning Director Milan Nevajda had found the rezoning application to be incomplete in September and was waiting for an updated submission.

"There is a process that every applicant has to go through and they were working through that process," Pride said Monday. "There is no special treatment."

Packard said her team will continue its partnership with the South Portland Housing Authority and move forward with an environmental remediation project on the former shipyard property in mid-November.

"We've met thousands of people in South Portland and throughout the state who share our commitment to address the housing crisis and we hope to continue that momentum,"

she said.

She said her team learned a lot over the last six years and the money spent on Yard South wasn't wasted. She said PK Realty owns and manages nearly 30 industrial properties in Greater Portland.

“We have a very healthy business beyond Yard South,” Packard said. “Real estate is a high-risk job. This song isn't over yet.”

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