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## **The Patriot Ledger**

*By Jack Encarnacao*

### **Governor tours SouthField**

#### **Patrick first governor to visit the base since it closed in 1997**



*Deval Patrick is the first sitting Massachusetts governor to visit SouthField, touting the project at the former naval air station as one of the state's designated "Growth Districts." At left is Sen. Michael Morrissey and, at right, State Rep Ron Mariano.*

WEYMOUTH — In his nearly two decades working on the redevelopment of the former South Weymouth Naval Air Station, Rep. Ronald Mariano has tried to lure the state's chief executive to visit the sprawling property.

"I've tried to get Weld down here, Cellucci, Swift, Romney," Mariano said. "This is the first time a governor's recognized this for the important economic engine that it is."

Gov. Deval Patrick visited the base Thursday to declare it one of 16 "growth districts" in the state. He is the first governor to visit the base since the Navy closed it in 1997.

"It's big; it's broad; it's ambitious, and I like all that about it," Patrick said of SouthField. "I like the commitment to creating a sense of village in the area."

Developer LNR Property Corp. plans to build 2,855 residences and 2 million square feet of commercial space on the 1,400-acre base, renamed SouthField, by 2017. The first 500 residences are being built, and the first SouthField residents are expected to move in next year.

Patrick chatted with base stakeholders, one of whom flew in from California. A host of local and state officials were also on hand.

Patrick toured the base's dusty construction sites and expansive former runways. He also spent time studying maps of the property and asking questions about where certain SouthField components will be located, including the east-west parkway.

Patrick endorsed the project in a big way in January when he agreed to issue a \$42.5 million state bond to pay for the construction of the parkway through SouthField, a central component.

Patrick said a key advantage of designating SouthField a growth district is that permits for businesses are guaranteed to be vetted in 90 days.

"It's not very glamorous-sounding, but it's enormously important to investors," Patrick said. "That is the number one critique about doing business in Massachusetts ... the time it takes to work your way through getting all the permission you need to do business."

If they fit certain parameters, like biotechnology, some businesses will be able to locate on SouthField even faster because many permits will already be in place for their particular use.

"There's a portion of the site that's already pre-permitted on a state level," said Gregory Bialecki, the state's permitting ombudsman, a position created in January. "The whole variety of permits you need, most of them will have already been obtained for the project as a whole. So when that one new user comes in for that one lot, they may only need or two permits instead of 10 or 15."

Patrick addressed an audience of about 100 in a new SouthField marketing center, which contains sunny brochures with artistic images of the development; there were also flat panel televisions playing computer-generated animations of SouthField in full bloom.

"We're at the stage where people are starting to recognize the fact that this is real," said Mariano, who was involved with failed plans for the property, including building a mega-mall there.

Officials from Weymouth, Rockland and Abington filled in Patrick on how their communities could benefit from SouthField.

Weymouth Mayor Sue Kay pitched her idea of expanding historical tourism out from the new property. James Simpson, chairman of Rockland's board of selectmen, stressed linking SouthField's commercial center with struggling downtown Rockland.

"We're looking at SouthField as one of the keys to our survival," Simpson told Patrick.