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FEATURED

River project just keeps rolling along

By Mike LaBella mlabella@eagletribune.com Aug 12, 2017



Ashley Scott and her daughters Faith, 6, and Ashanda, 1, along with their dog, Gizmo, enjoy taking daily walks along the boardwalk behind Harbor Place, where they live.



HAVERHILL — For city officials who have been working to open the riverfront to new development while also providing the public with access to the Merrimack “it’s a dream coming true,” says Mayor James Fiorentini.

For decades, officials have been working to capitalize on the river. Now, their vision is beginning to be fully realized.

“What I’ve been talking about during my last two or three terms is reorienting the city toward the river with rezoning and walking paths, including the boardwalk,” Fiorentini said. “The next phase is to extend the Rail Trail from the Basiliere Bridge to the Crescent Yacht Club.”

The roughly half-mile long trail that runs between the Basiliere and Comeau bridges on the Bradford side of the river was recently named for Fiorentini.

“When we opened it in a rudimentary way a few years ago it gave you a place to walk, and then we finished it,” he said. “We’ll do the same thing with the next phase. We’ve recently cleared land between the Basiliere Bridge and the Crescent Yacht Club, but we have more to do.”

He said the city also is looking to develop a better walking path along Water Street leading to Riverside Park.

“Our plan is to install benches and bike racks and create landscaped views overlooking the water,” Fiorentini said.

On the Haverhill side of the river, the new boardwalk behind Harbor Place is seeing greater use while city officials make plans to extend it yet again.

“This is our second time doing the loop,” said Haverhill resident Mario Jorge. “This is a great thing and I think the mayor has done a great job bringing this city in the right direction.”

He and his wife, Susan, and their son, Nicholas, 19, along with their dog, Ruben, had just finished walking the loop via the Basiliere and Comeau bridges and paused on the boardwalk behind Harbor Place.

“I’d love to see the city create an event to bring attention to the boardwalk and to the city,” Jorge said. “Maybe a 1.9 mile walk.”

That’s the distance of the entire walking loop, he said, noting that he and his wife measured it using a smartphone app.

Ashley Scott, 27, lives in an apartment at Harbor Place and says she loves taking walks along the boardwalk with her children and her dog.

“We’ve even done the loop a few times, and it’s been fun,” she said.

Andrew Herlihy, the city’s division director of Community Development, said the city received funding from the state to extend the boardwalk an additional 80 feet, from behind Haverhill Bank to behind a building at 192 Merrimack St. that is owned by local developer Sal Lupoli.

“That building will be demolished this year, and a two-level parking facility will be built as part of our already awarded MassWorks grant,” Herlihy said. “That additional 80 feet, to be built between now and next June, will tie in with a parking facility to be built at 192 Merrimack St. starting this fall.”

He said that parking facility will support Lupoli’s planned 10-story “Heights” development, in a way that is similar to how Harbor Place ties in to its boardwalk.

“A new grant application proposal would additionally extend the boardwalk to the Post Office in Washington Square, but we have to win that grant,” Herlihy said.

Fiorentini said the Rail Trail is poised to be extended from the Basiliere Bridge to the Crescent Yacht Club, and that overgrowth along that stretch of river was recently cleared. Future plans are to extend the trail to Groveland and to Georgetown.

“The city turned its back on the river for a hundred years and then we built a flood wall, which was necessary,” Fiorentini said. “All the factories discharged into the river years ago, and into Little River as well, and it made the river an uncomfortable place... The river was horrible in the 1950s and it lingered until the ‘70s or ‘80s, when we built the water treatment plant.

“Once the factories started to close, we began looking at reuses for the river,” Fiorentini said. “We are getting there, but it’s a long-term project. Our waterfront zoning promotes development along the river, provided we get access to the river, whether it’s a park or a walking trail.”

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