

Benefits of Harbor Place continue to increase

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It seems the Harbor Place project will help Haverhill in more ways than you can count.

There is the obvious gain of eventually having a complex occupied by people instead of the old Woolworth building, which stood empty for decades.

Haverhill's reputation is getting a boost, as state officials rave about Harbor Place as a model of how to use private and public money successfully.

There are the economic gains promised by the project, everything from people being drawn to the planned UMass Lowell satellite campus to the spin-off benefit of more customers for existing downtown businesses.

Harbor Place will bring more use of the Merrimack River, long touted as an economic resource that Haverhill should tap into. In recent years, the city has done just that, with a sharp increase in boating and development of other riverfront properties.

Harbor Place not only overlooks the river — it will also have a plaza and boardwalk, allowing the public spend time at the river's edge. That translates to more visitors to the downtown, more people to support businesses there. It will also make the area more desirable for businesses to move to.

Then there are subtle benefits from the project, aesthetics such as an improved view of the eastern end of downtown from the Bradford side of the river.

As Harbor Place is built, Bradford people are saying how nice it is to watch. **(See story, Page 1.)**

They also anticipate a welcoming view of the finished product, in stark comparison to what used to stand there — the dingy backs of old buildings.

"We talk about it quite often as we can see it from our yard where we sell plants and gardening supplies," Patrick Lane, owner of Arthur Sharp Farm Supply and True Value Hardware in Bradford, told reporter Mike LaBella. "We've been watching it daily.

"We've watched it expand and get bigger and nicer," he said of the growth of Harbor Place. "The new boardwalk is coming along nicely and is already within 10 feet of the existing boardwalk behind Haverhill Bank on Merrimack Street. It's fenced off, but you can see how close workers are to connecting the two boardwalks together."

Lane said he imagines people visiting the riverfront courtyard being built across the Merrimack from his store.

"You can tell it will be really nice and will face the river, so people there can see us," he said. "We plan to put up a sign at the back of our building to invite people over," he said. "The back of my building is a huge mural for the rail trail. So the people sitting there sipping on an ice tea can see our mural and wonder what we have inside."

That's yet another benefit of Harbor Place. We'll keep counting.

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