

The Eagle-Tribune

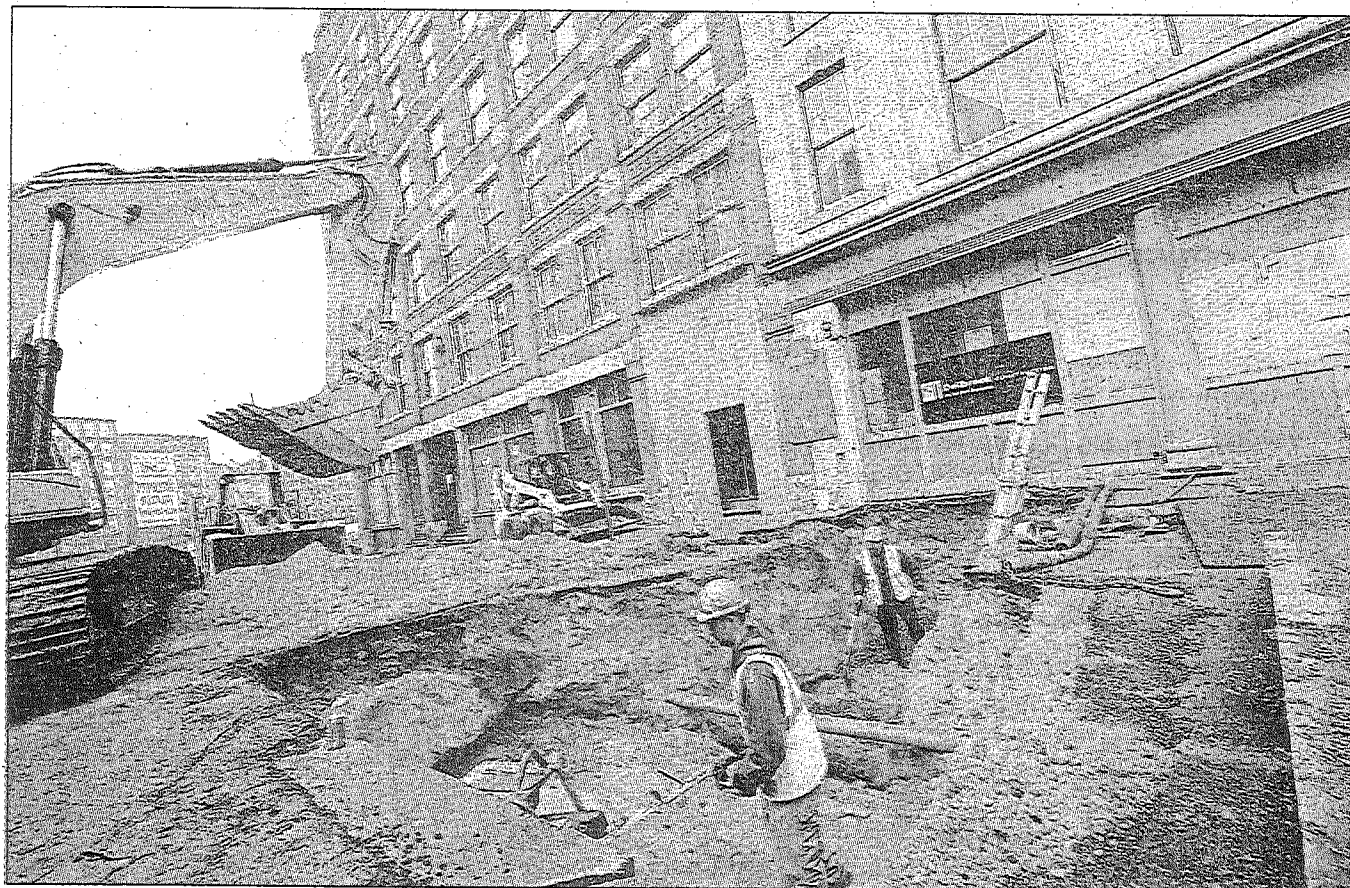
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HAVERHILL

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Making way for 57 more new homes downtown



TIM JEAN/Staff photo

Gabriel Pagan, front, and Basil Papachristos of Greener Excavation in Lowell compact crushed rock to back fill a hole containing a sewer line that leads to the old Hayes Building in Haverhill.

SHOP WHERE YOU LIVE

BY SHAWN REGAN
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HAVERHILL — Work is underway on the third major factory-to-housing conversion in the shadow of the downtown train station, and the developer is anticipating it will be finished in time for occupancy by late summer.

The Charles Hayes Building redevelopment on Granite Street is to include 57 one- and two-bedroom homes — 33 apartments that will be reserved for low- and middle-income renters, and 24 that will initially be rentals and then converted to condominiums within five years. Nineteen of the condos will be sold

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to middle-income buyers and five will be market-rate units.

The Boston Archdiocese’s nonprofit Planning Office for Urban Affairs is the

developer.

The agency intends to market the units as “work force homes” for people who commute to jobs in Boston or work for the city or local companies, said William Grogan, the agency’s chief operating officer.

The project is to be the first of the downtown’s factory conversions with retail space on the ground floor.

The developer’s agreement with the city calls for three retail businesses on Granite Street, which faces the Washington Street train station and is across from the Railroad Square property, where the city is building a \$10 million parking garage this

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Ed Gagnon of Greener Excavation of Lowell scoops crushed rock while working on a sewer line leading into the old Hayes Building. The building will be converted into 57 apartments and a number of retail stores. TIM JEAN/Staff photo

CONVERSION: Downtown seeing more changes

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summer, city officials said.

William Pillsbury, Haverhill's economic development director, said the developer is in active talks with several retailers interested in leasing space, but that it was premature to name the firms. Grogan said business offices and retail stores and shops are among the possibilities.

Pillsbury said the company also has a deal with the city to lease at least 20 parking spaces for tenants in the new downtown garage when it is ready.

"It's another key piece of the downtown revitalization," Pillsbury said of the development. "It's going to be exciting to see retail return to Granite Street, on top of everything else going on over there. The idea is retail shops will make the area more pedestrian-friendly. All the new residents will mean more business for the restaurants, the train station and the other businesses in the area."

Workers began the first phase of the project in September, demolishing the interior, installing new electrical, plumbing and fire suppression systems, and cleaning the exterior. Large hoses run down the sides of the building. They are used to remove material, which is then hauled away.

The agency also recently cleaned and rehabilitated a 19-space parking lot on the property at the corner of Essex Street that had been polluted, Grogan said.

The project brings the number of new apartments and condominiums built or under construction downtown to around 600.

The property at 14-44 Granite St. is actually two historic mill buildings — a six-story building that was constructed in 1894, and a seven-story addition built in 1911. Various manufacturers set up shop in the buildings over the years, including an electrical equipment maker, photo finisher, and millwork producer.

The 81,000-square-foot

building was recently assessed at \$434,000, prior to the start of the rehabilitation, according to city tax records. The Planning Office of Urban Affairs first announced its interest in the property in December 2006.

The agency has built or is building other housing projects in the region in Lynn, Salem and Lowell. On its Web site, it describes itself as a "self-sustaining social justice ministry of the archdiocese." It has built about 2,300 units of mixed-income housing in the Northeast since it was established in 1969 by the late Cardinal Richard Cushing.

While the agency is affiliated with the archdiocese, it is financially independent of the Catholic Church, its officials have said.

Mayor James Fiorentini said the city's adoption of a state law called Chapter 40R two years ago played a major role in the agency choosing Haverhill for the housing project.

The city used the law to create a 53-acre zone downtown where building housing is faster,

easier and potentially less costly than outside the zone. Proposals in the district are no longer subject to reviews by multiple city boards and they cannot be stopped by the City Council. Under the old zoning rules, proposals to convert large factories to housing required a special permit from the council. Now, a housing proposal in the zone only needs to meet pre-approved design standards and undergo a review by the council.

The Granite Street project is the second large housing development since the council approved the 40R district. The other is the \$75 million, 305-unit Hamel Mills Lofts by Forest City Enterprises of Cleveland.

The \$39 million, 146-unit Cor-dovan complex on Locust Street was the first of the large factory-to-housing conversions.

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