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City gets \$10M for river boardwalk

Public river access beefs up Woolworth site project

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--- — HAVERHILL — The city is getting another boost in its efforts to resurrect the downtown, this time \$10 million to build a river boardwalk.

The walkway will reach from the Basiliere Bridge to an existing boardwalk at the other end of downtown behind Haverhill Bank, linking the area so visitors can walk that entire stretch of the Merrimack River.

Gov. Deval Patrick and other state officials were in Haverhill yesterday to announce the grant, which brings the state's total investment in a project at the eastern end of downtown to \$25 million, said state Rep. Brian Dempsey, D-Haverhill, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Officials at yesterday's event also announced demolition of the old Woolworth building, vacant for 40 years, will likely begin in September, clearing the way for construction of two new buildings. They are the five-story Harbor Place, which will house a UMass Lowell satellite campus on the second and third floors, and a second building with stores or a restaurant on the first floor and 80 apartments on upper floors.

Some details of the project at the Woolworth site were announced in early February, but yesterday's event highlighted other developments. They included an announcement that Pentucket Bank will demolish its older building in front of the Merrimack Street parking deck and move its headquarters into the fourth floor of the Harbor Place building. The space created by that demolition is expected to be used for parking spaces, Dempsey said.

Officials said the Harbor Place building will also have Haverhill Community TV as a tenant on the first floor, along with a restaurant. The building has commitments for about 90 percent of its commercial space, officials said. They said the fifth floor will have commercial space.

The new buildings and boardwalk are aimed at revitalizing the eastern gateway to downtown, in much the same way the western end of the inner-city has been boosted by new apartments, condos and businesses such as restaurants.

The project will allow for demolition of the deteriorated Woolworth building at the eastern gateway. The building has been an eyesore for years.

Other buildings to be demolished starting in the spring include the Ocasio and Newman's Furniture buildings, as well as several more buildings heading west, city officials said.

"This goes back two and a half years and the governor and Chancellor Meehan have been great partners," Dempsey said following yesterday's event. "The whole project has been a great partnership."

Scott Cote, president and CEO of Pentucket Bank, said the bank's board of directors decided to move part of the Pentucket operation to Harbor Place to invest in the downtown's future.

"Leasing space at One Harbor Place will solidify our long-term commitment to the residents of Haverhill and the revitalization of the downtown," Cote said. "Our participation in this project makes another strong statement about the bank's roots and continuing commitment to downtown Haverhill, dating back to 1891. It also provides us with the opportunity to remain in Haverhill's downtown for many years to come while also being a part of the exciting future activities that will be related to this new development project."