

Projects big and small will boost downtown

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It sounds cliché, but it's true — every little bit counts.

Small things do indeed add up to big changes.

That's especially true in the downtown, where observers can point to plenty of developments causing change for the better.

Just take a look at the Harbor Place project at the location of the old Woolworth building. It is taking shape and becoming the dominant building in the eastern end of downtown.

Drive a bit farther down Merrimack Street and you'll see other pieces beginning to fit into of the eastern downtown puzzle. A building that is going up next to the main Harbor Place building is also taking shape. When finished, it will have dozens of housing units on upper floors and businesses on the ground floor.

Those are all big changes.

But more subtle changes for the area are also being quietly discussed. Developers are looking at properties for sale farther down Merrimack Street, with the possibility of investing there and bringing in new businesses.

Such deals can plant the seeds of what Haverhill hopes will be an overhaul of Merrimack Street well beyond the eastern gateway where Harbor Place is being built.

Then there are smaller changes coming to Merrimack Street. Take the plans for the front of the parking deck, for example.

The city recently held a contest where people suggested uses for land in front of the deck. It's a small area, but a prime location.

The winner was Leota Sarrette, a local woman who has been involved in many volunteer projects in the city in recent years. **(See story, Page 1.)**

Sarrette's idea is to bring in performances by musicians, dancers, puppeteers and actors. There would also be yoga classes and interactive educational programs. The events are intended to bring families to the area.

The project is being funded with a \$6,000 state grant that will pay to make Sarrette's vision happen. It will also pay for outdoor chairs, lighting and other amenities needed to create a gathering spot. Events, or semi-permanent installations. The idea is to draw people there, include art and improve the

public's perception of the site.

It's not a lot of money, nor it is it a blockbuster project. But it is yet another twist in the effort to bring new life to that part of downtown.

The more projects that come to the area, the better.

The variety, big and small, will catch people's attention and lure them in.