

Topping it off

By Mike LaBella mlabella@eagletribune.com | Posted: Friday, November 20, 2015 7:13 am

HAVERHILL — Project developers, local and state officials, and others signed a steel beam Thursday before a crane lifted it, adorned with a small tree and a flag, onto the roof of the five-story Harbor Place commercial building.

The celebration marked a milestone for the new Harbor Place at the site of the former F.W. Woolworth Co. overlooking the Merrimack River.

The steel frame of the commercial building was recently erected after months of site preparation. Now workers are pouring concrete onto corrugated steel decking that will form the floors of the building, which will house a satellite campus for UMass Lowell, along with other tenants.

Workers plan to wrap the building to retain heat this winter so they can begin exterior framing, along with brick-and-mortar work and window installation. Interior projects will include wiring, plumbing and heating and ventilation.

The commercial building is expected to be open to tenants in July 2016, while a six-story residential building now under construction next door to open about four months later.

Chancellor: UMass has big plans

Among those attending the ceremony was new UMass Lowell Chancellor Jacqueline Moloney, who is the first woman to be named chancellor of the university.

Moloney said the university has big plans for its satellite campus at Harbor Place, which will take up the second and third floors of the commercial building.

Moloney said UMass is looking to offer management, criminal justice and information technology programs at the Harbor Place campus. She said there also is interest in offering nursing and health administration programs.



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AMANDA SABGA/ Staff photo State Rep. Brian Dempsey, UMass Lowell Chancellor Jacqueline Moloney, Mayor James Fiorentini, Ron Trembly, Bill Grogan, Sally Cerasuolo-O'Rorke and Lisa Alberghini sign a beam during a topping off ceremony at Harbor Place. 11/19/15

She said the downtown Haverhill campus will host a range of programs during the day, evenings and on weekends, in addition to other possibilities.

"We share a broader vision for the satellite so it's not just students coming in and leaving," Moloney said.

Moloney said other ideas are being explored for the satellite campus, including using a portion of the facility as an incubator for new businesses.

"UMass Lowell is the 10th fastest growing university in the country, so it makes a lot of sense for us to come to this region and support this economic development initiative," Moloney said.

A 'transformative' development

The \$70 million Harbor Place development will include HC Media on the first floor, the UMass Lowell satellite campus on the second and third floors, Pentucket Bank on the fourth floor, and tenants yet to be chosen for the fifth floor.

A plaza and two other public entrance points will provide public access to the Merrimack River, where a new boardwalk will be built. Underground parking is part of the project, too.

An adjacent six-story building will include 80 housing units on upper floors and first-floor retail shops and restaurants.

The Merrimack Street Ventures project is a partnership between the nonprofit Greater Haverhill Foundation, the same group that developed the Ward Hill Business Park in the 1960s, and the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, the nonprofit residential development arm of the Boston Catholic Archdiocese.

Lisa Alberghini, president of the Archdiocese's Planning Office for Urban Affairs, served as emcee for the topping-off ceremony. She called Harbor Place a "transformative" development that is changing the face of the downtown.

Alberghini thanked a number of local officials, including Mayor James Fiorentini, who she said helped create an environment that welcomes development. She also thanked the City Council for its support, and especially State Rep. Brian Dempsey.

"None of this would have happened without him," Alberghini said of Dempsey, who helped secure millions of dollars in state funding.

Dempsey told the crowd that before construction began, people had been asking when Harbor Place was going to be built, and if it would be built.

"To be standing here today and looking at this.... and to do it at such speed," Dempsey said.

Fiorentini told the crowd that since he's been mayor he's met between 50 and 100 people who expressed interest in redeveloping the Woolworth site, but that nothing came to fruition until Dempsey got behind the Harbor Place project.

"None of it matters unless you have a person like Brian Dempsey, who made this happen," Fiorentini said.

Everyone attending the celebration was invited to sign a steel beam using an indelible marker. A crane hoisted the beam onto the roof of the Harbor Place commercial building.

Following the ceremony, Greater Haverhill Foundation members Sally Cerasuolo-O'Rorke and Ronald Trombley distributed bricks salvaged from the Woolworth building to various VIPs.

Each brick carried a brass plate engraved with the words: "Woolworth 1949, Haverhill's Past," and "Harbor Place 2015, Haverhill's Future."

Harbor Place is being designed by The Architectural Team Inc. of Chelsea. Dellbrook Construction of Quincy is the general contractor.