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FEATURED

Dempsey to leave Legislature for job with lobbying firm

State rep. brought millions in state funds to Haverhill

By Peter Francis pfrancis@eagletribune.com 14 hrs ago



AMANDA SABGA/ Staff file photo State Rep. Brian Dempsey, UMASS Lowell Chancellor Jacqueline Moloney, Mayor James Fiorentini, Ron Trembly, Bill Grogan, Sally O' Rorke and building committee members Lisa Alberghini sign one of the final beams being placed during a "topping off" ceremony at Harbor Place in 2015.

Amanda Sabga



HAVERHILL — With longtime state Rep. Brian S. Dempsey leaving a powerful post in the Legislature for a high-profile job in the private sector, Haverhill is losing a strong advocate on Beacon Hill.

Dempsey will retire in September from the Legislature to take an executive position with ML Strategies, a prominent Boston lobbying and consulting firm associated with the Mintz Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo law firm.

Dempsey, a Democrat, has represented the 3rd Essex District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives since 1991, serving as chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee since 2011.

Considered by many to be the heir apparent to House Speaker Robert DeLeo, a Winthrop Democrat who ascended to the speakership in 2009 after chairing the House Ways and Means Committee himself, Dempsey's departure has many scratching their heads.

But he said Thursday that the opportunity presented to him by ML Strategies came together quickly and was simply too good to pass up.

"It's been a great experience privilege to serve Haverhill, a city I love. I wasn't looking for a job, but it's a tremendous firm with a tremendous reputation," said Dempsey, who declined to say how much he will be paid in his new role as senior vice president and chief operating officer for ML Strategies.

In his new capacity, Dempsey will handle a slew of administrative duties and will oversee a team of consultants in ML Strategies' Boston and Washington offices. He said the job has a "unique structure" and he will be working with a "very strong team."

Dempsey will also have to abide by a state lobbying law that prohibits him from directly lobbying his former colleagues on any issue.

Since being appointed chairman of Ways and Means by DeLeo, Dempsey has authored seven state budgets and was the lead House negotiator on the \$40.2 billion state budget approved by the Legislature last week.

Over the years, Dempsey delivered millions of dollars to Haverhill, most notably \$45 million toward the more than \$70 million Harbor Place project on Merrimack Street and more than \$22 million to help the city pay off the debt for the former Hale Hospital.

At the time of the hospital's closure, it had saddled the city with the largest municipal debt in state history, and Dempsey has provided the city with \$2.4 million annually to help the city pay that obligation.

In addition to his work with the Hale and Harbor Place, Dempsey played a key role in bringing casinos to Massachusetts, co-authoring an Act Establishing Expanded Gaming in the Commonwealth. His fingerprints also adorn numerous energy and economic development bills passed during his tenure in the House.

But if you ask Dempsey, 50, about the accomplishments he's most proud of during his almost 27 years in the Legislature, he focuses on the small tasks that never garner much press.

"Hundreds of constituents have called over the years and that's the stuff I'm most proud of, the day-to-day part of the job," he said. "People call when they're having challenges and even as chair of Ways and Means, I worked to help people and to address their concerns."

Dempsey also listed more recent downtown projects such as completing the Merrimack River boardwalk which now bears his name, the construction of the new Hunking School, renovations to Haverhill Stadium and the incoming culinary program at Northern Essex Community College as other accomplishments he's most proud of.

Haverhill has benefited since Dempsey took hold of the state's purse strings in 2011. His departure means Haverhill will likely have to make do with less in the coming years.

Dempsey, however, is confident the city will be able to take what he has brought back over the years and continue to make progress in the areas of public safety and downtown development.

"In each budget, we try to position Haverhill well, whether it be money for the Hale debt or additional grants for public safety," he said. "These are the kinds of efforts that pay dividends in the long term."

Asked who he would like to see succeed him in his capacities as state representative and chairman of Ways and Means, Dempsey said he "wouldn't dare speculate" but envisions a vigorous primary full of capable candidates.

"I'm sure there will be any number of elected and unelected city leaders who will run. The district hasn't seen a lot of turnover," he said. "I have mixed emotions about leaving, but this is my 30th year in public office and it's a good time for a new challenge and to start a new chapter."