

Harbor Place grows skyward

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HAVERHILL — “It’s really happening.”

So said Melinda Barrett as she watched the Harbor place project finally beginning to take shape.

Her words are being echoed by merchants and workers across the downtown.

Barrett, a city councilor who owns Barrett’s Specialty Foods at 103 Merrimack St., said that for a while many people wondered if a building would really be constructed at the site. For months after the vacant Woolworth building was demolished, the site was an open pit filled with vehicles and workers.

But with the foundation work completed, the steel frame of the Harbor Place building is growing into the sky and is the talk of the downtown.

“Now that they see a structure there, they can see that it’s really happening,” Barrett said of observers. “I think everyone is looking forward to its opening Things are getting exciting.”

The \$70 million development will include HC Media on the first floor, a 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 boardwalk will be built.

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. A \$19 million grant was awarded to the project by the state.

Harbor Place is designed to boost the eastern end of downtown the way that hundreds of new housing units in old vacant shoe factories have helped the western end of downtown in recent years. That housing, plus a new parking garage and a popular restaurant district, have brought a new energy and



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AMANDA SABGA/Staff photo Harbor Place construction is moving skyward.10/27/15

economic boost to western downtown.

Harbor Place workers are erecting the structural steel for the first building — a five-story, glass-and-brick edifice where the old Woolworth building stood vacant for more than 40 years.

City Economic Development Director William Pillsbury said construction of the building's steel frame is an important milestone in the project.

“This contributes to the excitement that the project is moving ahead on schedule and on budget,” he said.

Pillsbury said the next phase of the project is to complete the building's steel structure, then make it weather tight so work can take place inside during the winter.

Merchants expect that when Harbor Place opens in mid- to late 2016, it will herald the start of a new day for eastern downtown.

Barrett said she is impressed with the speed of construction, as the steel frame of the building reaches higher into the sky each day.

“They had two stories up, then a third and now they are working on the fourth floor and are going even higher,” she said. “The steel rose up from behind a blue tarp that wrapped around the construction site. Now it's way above. Once they got going, they've really been moving.”

Dany Bouraphael, co-owner of Beach Pizza at 181 Merrimack St., said that as the structure grows, it is generating excitement downtown and elsewhere in Haverhill.

“I think a lot of larger companies will start investing in Haverhill once UMass Lowell is up and running,” Bouraphael said. “The steel structure is most visible and shows the project is well underway. You can see progress now and it's getting everyone excited.”