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ON THE STREET

Charting a course for renewal along the coastline

Lynn looks to finally take advantage of a long-neglected resource

By [Tim Logan](#) and [Janelle Nanos](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 9, 2021, 9:17 a.m.



People walked on the dock at the Seaport Landing Marina in Lynn. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

The [On the Street](#) series looks at the past, present, and future of neighborhoods in Greater Boston.

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LYNN — Driving up the Lynnway, past the shuttered flea market and the discount furniture stores

and the vast lot full of decaying cars being scrapped for parts, it can be hard to see the vision of the North Shore city's waterfront as a place filled with people, parks, new housing, and good jobs.

Actually, it's hard to even see the water.

But it's there, just over a berm that covers an old landfill. That 305-acre swath of land between the Lynnway and the Atlantic Ocean today is a mishmash of light industry and old shopping plazas. But many people hope it can spark a revival the city has long been seeking.

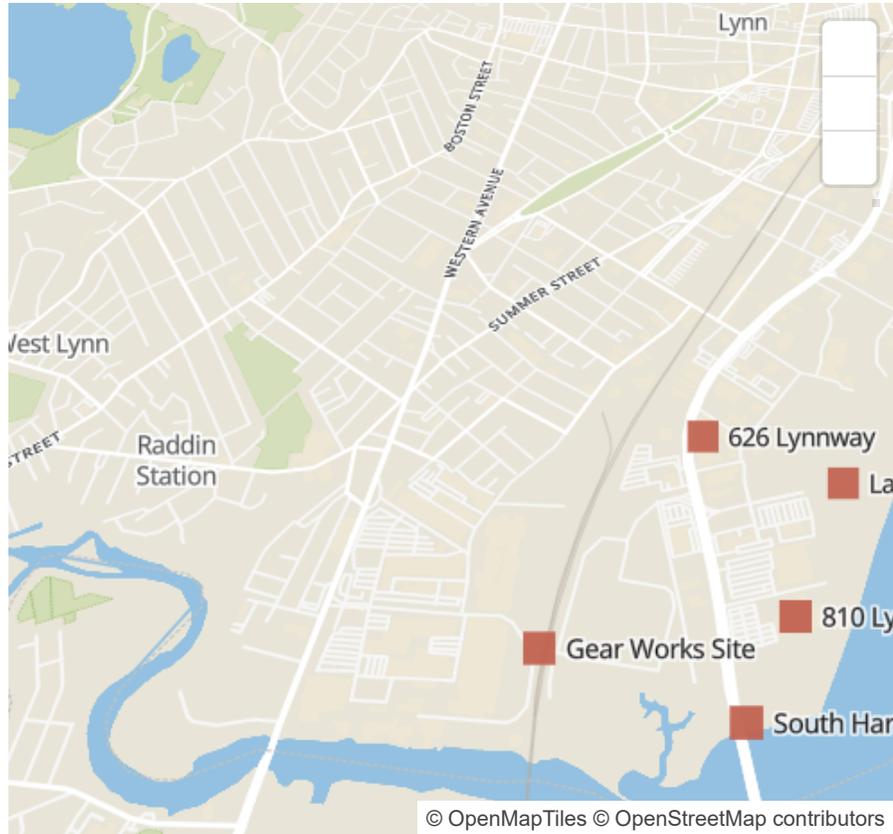
This stretch of Route 1A — to some just a pass-through from Revere north to Swampscott or Nahant — has long been seen as key to the city's future. The heavy industry that lined Lynn Harbor has largely faded away, but what's come in to replace it — car dealerships and big-box retail — never coalesced into something greater.

“The city made mistake after mistake over the years as far as what we allowed to be built there,” said Jim Cowdell, executive director of Lynn's Economic Development and Industrial Corp. “Now we have a vision.”

That vision is spelled out in a new round of waterfront plans finished in 2019 and 2020. They call for a large park on the landfill site, blocks of apartment and condo buildings, and better connections to downtown, which today is accessible mostly by one small footbridge over the six-lane speedway.

A changing waterfront

A string of big projects are in the works along Lynn's long-industrial waterfront. Tap on the red square for more information



Sources: [Lynn Waterfront Plan](#)

 A Flourish data visualization

“The Lynnway is so brutal,” Cowdell quipped. “We call it the great divide.”

The plans even call for a a mile-and-a-half-long boardwalk along the water, from the North Harbor near downtown to the mouth of the Saugus River.

It’s a long-term plan, and a long way from what’s there now. But the pieces are starting to fall into place.

On the northern end of the strip, developers are nearly done with a \$90 million, 331-unit apartment complex called Breakwater North Harbor. It’s set to open in July. To the south, the 8-acre site of the old Lynnway Mart, which closed last summer, is permitted for 550 apartments.



A housing development is planned for the site of the now-closed Lynnway Mart, which is currently hosting a COVID-19 testing operation. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

When developer Pat McGrath put the site on the market, he said, it generated a lot of interest. He's near a deal to sell to a large Boston-area housing developer that would build the complex.

"Five years ago, no one wanted to be in Lynn," McGrath said. "Now there's just so much going on."

But it's not all going to happen at once. Much of the strip remains industrial, and the city's plans acknowledge some of it will stay that way. The sprawling sewage treatment plant and the big LNG tank aren't going anywhere. Even some of the new investors in the area plan to stick with generally industrial uses while they see what develops around them.

Just in January, real estate firm A.W. Perry and its partners spent \$9.9 million to buy the old Garelick Farms milk plant and a neighboring 10-acre parking lot. For now, said senior vice president Rob Maloney, they are renovating the 250,000-square-foot dairy and bottling plant

President Bob Maloney, they are renovating the 230,000 square foot dairy and bottling plant, likely for use as a distribution center or food processing plant.



Inside the former Garelick Farms Dairy plant on the Lynnway, workers prepared to remove large storage tanks from the site so it can be redeveloped for industrial use. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

Down the road, Maloney said, they'd love to see life science companies there, or a mix of housing and retail. But getting more industrial tenants first will buy time to figure out what might work.

"We love Lynn long-term," he said. "If we can lease these spaces, that enables us to be patient and be out there hunting for bigger things."

In some spots, though, the city is trying to speed up the process.

When McGrath bought an old truck stop off the Lynnway a few years ago, his plan was to put a self-storage facility there. There are several like it nearby, and he was all set to go with the Zoning Board of Appeals, McGrath said, when he walked Mayor Tom McGee.

"He said, 'That's not in my vision for this corridor,'" McGrath recalled. "I said, 'OK we'll do what

you want, Mayor.’ ”

Now work is underway on a 72-unit condominium building. Demand is strong, McGrath said, and he expects they will sell quickly.

“At the end of the day, I’m going to make one-and-a-half times as much money doing it this way,” he said.

Of course, a waterfront studded with high-end housing brings other concerns.

For one, blue-collar jobs in companies that still line the strip could be displaced. The vendors who filled the Lynnmart have already scattered. Also, sea-level rise looms as a threat. And some wonder how much a wealthy waterfront for newcomers will help current residents of a largely working-class city.



A new housing development under construction is visible from Lynn Heritage State Park. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

Isaac Simon Hodes, director of housing advocacy group Lynn United for Change, noted that the city rewrote its own harbor plan to put the new Breakwater building – where one-bedrooms will start at about \$2,000 a month – on a site that had been planned for a “signature” waterfront park. He

hopes Lynn doesn't forget the lessons of another new neighborhood built along the ocean, 10 miles to the south.

"We've seen what's happened in other places like the Seaport," Hodes said. "We don't need a bunch of segregated enclaves that lock out most working-class renters and people of color."

Still, Cowdell said, there's so much potential on Lynn's waterfront, and realizing it could boost the entire city.

There'll still be a big park, just further south where the landfill is now being capped. The whole waterfront, some day, will be publicly accessible, not just buried behind scrap metal yards and bus parking lots. And all that housing will bring new residents who will support new restaurants and other businesses, helping to create a new wave of jobs.

"This all started with a plan, a vision," he said. "We're sticking to it."

Read more about Lynn and explore the full [On the Street series](#).

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