

State grants boost Lynn, Salem, Gloucester waterfronts

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Lynn and Salem can advance their public waterfront projects and Gloucester will get help with its harbor planning as a result of three grants approved by the state's Seaport Advisory Council.

The council authorized \$5.1 million June 21, with Lynn to receive \$3.23 million, Salem \$1.75 million, and Gloucester \$125,000. Chaired by Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray, the council allots funds to improve and develop commercial aspects of local ports and harbors.

Funding for two local ferry-related projects comes as the financially strapped MBTA on July 1 will implement bus and subway fare increases and some service cuts to prevent a deficit in the next fiscal year. Lawmakers are finalizing a \$49 million bailout plan to avoid steeper cuts and fare increases. The MBTA is not involved in the operation of Salem's city-owned ferry, and would not be involved in Lynn's planned ferry.

The funding for Lynn, awarded to the city's Economic Development & Industrial Corp., will pay for the third and final phase of a project to build a terminal on Blossom Street for the city's commuter ferry to Boston. Salem is expanding its landing for ferry and cruise ship service, while Gloucester will use the funds to develop its waterfront.

"We are very happy," said James Cowdell, executive director of the Lynn EDIC. "This is a dream that started in 2007, so it's been going on five years. Now that phase two is completed, people can see that this is going to happen. So everyone is just very excited about looking forward to when the Lynn ferry kicks off."

The project's first phase, funded with \$750,000 awarded by Seaport Advisory Council in 2007, was completed in 2008. It involved renovating the city's existing public landing, as well as drainage, water, and sewer improvements, and the repaving of the parking lot.

The just-completed second phase built a new steel bulkhead to replace the existing one. It was funded with \$1.39 million awarded by the council in October 2010, and another \$259,300 granted by the agency last year after a rise in steel prices unexpectedly increased the project cost.

The final phase calls for dredging 4,000 cubic yards of material in front of the terminal and building the 60-foot dock.

Cowdell said that once the final phase is done, the city will purchase a ferry and hire an operator, estimating that the service could begin operating in 18 months to two years. He said his agency will be looking for federal grant money to help with the cost of purchasing the boat, estimated at \$2 million to \$4 million.

Salem's award will allow the city to continue with its project to convert a temporary pier on Blaney Street to a larger permanent wharf.

The city built the pier in 2006 to serve as the home of a commuter ferry boat it acquired and began operating that year. The planned wharf would accommodate the ferry as well as cruise ships and fishing boats.

“It’s great news,” Mayor Kimberly L. Driscoll, who sits on the Seaport Advisory Council, said of the grant. “Our waterfront is so important not only to our economy but our quality of life in Salem.”

The city last summer completed a first phase of the project. With \$1 million from the Seaport Advisory Council and \$400,000 in matching city funds, the work involved installing utilities, paving the seawall improvements, and construction of a small-scale ferry terminal building.

Other previous council and federal grants had paid for construction of the temporary pier, and purchase of the ferry and a parking area.

Last year, the council granted Salem another \$632,644 to match a \$2.5 million federal grant the city had been awarded in 2010 for the project’s second phase. That work calls for dredging the channel in front of the site, building a permanent wharf that would extend 260 feet from shore, and installing floating docks.

Of the \$1.75 million just awarded, \$1 million will go toward the dredging, allowing the city to remove more material than originally planned according to Kathleen Winn, deputy director of the city’s Department of Planning and Community Development. In all, about 28,000 cubic yards of material will be removed.

Salem plans to use another \$600,000 of the council award to match an additional \$2.5 million federal grant it is currently seeking. If the city secures the federal money, the combined \$3.1 million would fund the project’s third phase. That works calls for extending the permanent pier outward another 100 feet, building a harbor walk, and carrying out additional onshore improvements, including lighting, landscaping, and final paving.

The remaining \$175,000 would be used to build a public walkway linking the site to the adjacent Salem Harbor Station pier, contingent on the city securing permission to use the pier, currently owned by Dominion.

Gloucester, whose mayor, Carolyn Kirk, is also a seaport council member, will use its award to renew its Harbor Plan and Designated Port Area Master Plan, five-year development blueprint for port activities, according to Sarah Garcia, the city’s harbor planning director.

Garcia said the theme of the new plan will be how the city can diversify its working waterfront by attracting additional uses that are compatible with the existing fishing and tourism industries.

“We are delighted,” she said of the council finding. “We look forward to working with the state further on supporting the working port and Massachusetts’ competitive edge in the maritime economy.”