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EDIC/LYNN DIRECTOR: POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS DOWNTOWN

By **THOR JOURGENSEN**

LYNN — More than \$100 million in new development, including a 349-apartment waterfront

complex, is poised to take root this year in downtown and on the waterfront, Lynn Economic Development and Industrial Corporation Director James Cowdell said Wednesday.

Cowdell told Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce members developers will pull permits next month for an \$80 million project slated to be built on vacant land opposite North Shore Community College and overlooking the water.

Cowdell said City Councilors in December gave a food importer currently using the former Vlahos Brothers building on Friend Street as a warehouse permission to build a six-story building on the corner of Friend and Silsbee streets. The project plan calls for 80 residential units and a first-floor supermarket primarily catering to the large Russian-speaking population living around Broad Street.

Cowdell said cooperation between city, state and federal planners and elected officials in November underpins high expectations for local development this year. After Gov. Charlie Baker announced the cooperative effort, federal officials followed up with a tour of potential local project sites.

“I’ve never seen an alliance like this. Lynn is definitely on the radar,” Cowdell said.

He said zoning changes drafted in 2003 helped set the stage for downtown residential development, beginning with the former Boston Machine building and followed by the transformation of Central Square, Essex and Munroe street buildings into residences.

The list of new residential projects, or ones in the planning stage, include converting the former medical offices at Broad and Silsbee streets into 12 market-rate apartments with ground-floor commercial use.

The former bank building at 23 Central Ave. is slated for an \$11 million renovation to create 49 residential units on seven floors. The once-condemned building at 33 Central Ave. now has eight condominiums on its upper floors.

“We want something on the first floor that will tie into the arts and cultural district,” Cowdell told Chamber members.

Adding more places to live downtown means city officials need to rethink how to provide downtown parking, said Acting Parking Commissioner Robert Stilian. Five city-owned lots have a total of 515 parking spaces, Stilian said, with an additional 965 spaces in the Market Street commuter garage.

“There is not enough parking. It is at a premium,” he said.

The Parking Department is automating lots to make it easier for drivers to pay to park and ending meter time enforcement after 6 p.m. to avoid ticketing downtown diners or concert goers.

Stilian said building a parking garage on the Buffum or Ellis Street lots may make sense, especially since the Ellis lot is located two blocks away from the proposed supermarket and residential development on Friend Street.

Cowdell also updated Chamber members Wednesday on plans for some of Lynn’s largest potential development sites, including South Harbor land where, he said, owner Joseph O’Donnell, is discussing a 300-unit development, and the Market Basket site on Federal Street where revised plans call for razing the former GE Factory of the Future building before building a grocery store.

“The earliest opening would be Thanksgiving, but that’s coming and it brings 350 jobs,” he said.

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