

Officials celebrate arrival of long-planned Lynn ferry

By Chris Stevens / The Daily Item | Posted: Thursday, May 15, 2014 3:00 am

LYNN — The wind whipped up whitecaps in the harbor as city and state officials cut a ribbon and cast off the notion that a community ferry in Lynn would never fly.

“If you could have seen this place ... the weeds were as high as me, there were sinkholes and the wall behind me was crumbling, but we had a dream,” said Economic Development and Industrial Corporation Executive Director James Cowdell describing the pier at the end of Blossom Street Extension.

Cowdell spoke to a crowd of more than 50 officials, including Gov. Deval Patrick, Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy, Sen. Thomas McGee, Rep. Robert Fennell and Secretary of Transportation Richard Davey, and a smattering of residents during Wednesday’s event.

The gathering capped off a project that was nearly six years in the making for Cowdell but almost twice that for McGee.

McGee said his teenage children were only 1 or 2 when he first took EDIC board member Ted Smith to Hingham to ride its commuter ferry. “And I said I want to do this in Lynn.”

With \$5 million in funding from the state’s Seaport Advisory Council, \$2 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation and \$650,000 from EDIC, McGee will get his wish when the ferry departs for its first official commute into Boston’s Long Wharf Monday at 6:30 a.m.

“That’s a little early for me,” he quipped. “I’ll be on the 8 a.m.”

Cowdell said he first brought Seaport Advisory Council Executive Secretary Director of Development Louis Elisa to the pier Jan. 2, 2007.

“It was about 2 degrees and the wind was howling off the ocean,” Cowdell said. “He would have agreed to anything at that point.”

Elisa said he was happy to see the project in reality “because on that January day I couldn’t see anything ... I kept wondering ‘what did (then-Lt. Governor) Tim Murray get me into?’”

Elisa said he was pleased to see that everyone stuck with their vision.

“This is a day we’ve worked years to see come to fruition,” Kennedy said, adding that it makes a nice alternative to driving into the city.

Patrick called the launch of the ferry not only a great day for Lynn but for the entire North Shore. He

said traveling by water is not only convenient but an attractive alternative and that it would likely lead to economic growth.

Cowdell noted that two large parcels that make up part of the city's waterfront district, the Beacon Chevrolet site at Market Street and the Lynnway and the General Electric property known as the Gear Plant, are both under agreement to be mixed-use developments.

"So today we celebrate," he said.

Cowdell said the large dirt patch located adjacent to the parking lot is his next dream. The plan is for a two-story building to be built in the very near future with a terminal on the bottom floor and a restaurant upstairs, he said.

The ferry will run as a pilot program for two years operated by Boston Harbor Cruises. It will run five days a week starting May 19 to Sept. 12, but McGee said he hopes it will eventually expand to seven days and include Boston Harbor Islands tours on the weekends.

The boat is scheduled to depart from the Blossom Street Extension pier at 6:30 a.m., 8 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., arriving at Long Wharf at 7:05 a.m., 8:35 a.m. and 7:05 p.m. Monday through Friday. It will also depart Long Wharf at 7:15 a.m. arriving in Lynn at 7:45 a.m., then again at 5:45 p.m. arriving in Lynn at 6:20 p.m. and 7:15 p.m. arriving in Lynn at 7:50 p.m.

Cowdell said parking and the ferry ride itself will be free for the first week, after that the cost for the 35-minute trip will be \$7 each way for adults. The ride will be \$3.50 for children and seniors and MBTA Zone 2 passes will be honored.

"I'll be here at 6:30 (a.m.) Monday handing out Dunkin' Donuts gift cards," Cowdell said.

Like Cowdell, Davey said when he first saw the pier three and a half years ago, it was a rocky mess with nothing going on but one man fishing. He said what he loves most about the commuter ferries in the state is that unlike the trains and buses, no one complains when the boat is late.

"Because they serve beer and wine on the boat," he said.

On sunny Friday afternoons, it's not unusual for commuters on the Hingham ferry to ask the captain to take an extra spin around one of the islands before heading to port, he added.

"So enjoy this," Davey said. "This is a great thing."