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BUSINESS LANDSCAPE CHANGES AS CITY GROWS

The Eagle-Tribune

Thursday, January 24, 2019

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ABOUT THIS SPECIAL SECTION

Makeovers bring business boom

Pockets of change mean stronger commercial landscape for city

By BILL CANTWELL
STAFF WRITER

Now *this* is a makeover. In recent years, several commercial areas in Haverhill have gotten major renovations, boosting the success of the business community and giving residents more places to shop and dine.

The makeovers have happened in places like Monument Square, which went from a collection of old buildings to sporting a new plaza anchored by a Walgreens. Across the street is a relatively new CVS, a symbol of the competition between the two stores.

The eastern end of downtown Haverhill has gotten a huge multimillion-dollar makeover with the addition of Harbor Place -- a complex that includes a UMass



AMANDA SABGA/Staff photos

The Five Guys restaurant near the Plaistow line.

Lowell satellite campus and several businesses overlooking busy White's Corner, Basiliere Bridge and the Merrimack River. The complex also has apartments, which is adding a residential element to the eastern end of downtown.

The restaurant row on

Route 125 near the Plaistow line continues to grow, with the addition of new places to eat such as the 110 Grill and Five Guys Burgers. Those restaurants are not only creating dining variety for residents -- they are also pushing existing restaurants to renovate, keeping



The construction of this CVS on Main Street was part of a major renovation of Monument Square that happened over a period of years.

them competitive with the newcomers.

History has cleared the way for business in one part of the city, as St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church was sold and demolished to make room for a plaza including a Dominos Pizza at the busy intersection

next to City Hall.

The most recent makeover is the addition of businesses at Riversedge Plaza, where a decayed parking lot has become home to a CVS. A Burger King restaurant is on the way.

The new developments are drawing more customers to

plazas and the downtown, benefiting nearby companies and the business community as a whole.

While some residents complain about problems like increased traffic in neighborhoods near the new businesses, Mayor James Fiorentini and his planners say the gains far outweigh the problems. They point to the creation of jobs, more property taxes coming to the city, the modernization of old properties and decrease of blight, and customers getting a greater variety of places to spend their money.

The latest chapter in the tradition of a strong Haverhill business community features changes to the commercial landscape and how they benefit the city.

This special section takes a look at those changes.

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ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO

Dougan Sherwood, president of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, enjoys a bird's eye view of the Basiliere Bridge from the chamber's new offices in the Harbor Place building at the eastern end of downtown.

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Trading history for business growth

Old church replaced by plaza with Domino's Pizza

By PAUL TENNANT
STAFF WRITER

For nearly 160 years, a church stood at Main and Winter streets.

It was built into the side of a gradually rising hill. It's one of Haverhill's most prominent locations, with City Hall and the Haverhill Public Library on the right side of Main Street – also known as Route 125 – and the former site of the church on the opposite side as one heads north.

Unitarians worshiped in that now-demolished white wooden building during its early years. The city's Armenian community purchased the building in the middle of the 20th century and St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church was a fixture there for many years.



A Domino's Pizza shop is now at the corner of Main and Winter streets where a church stood from 1848 until it was torn down in 2017.

A small stone memorial on the church property facing Winter Street offered a testimony as to why so many Armenians left their

homeland a little more than a century ago and settled in the Merrimack Valley. The monument recalls the approximately 1.5 million Armenians

who were slaughtered by the Ottoman Empire in 1915.

Most of those who survived the genocide fled.

Today the site is occupied



RYAN HUTTON/Staff photos

Demolition of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church left the building in rubble.

by a new plaza containing a Domino's Pizza shop, a dental office and other small businesses. The church was demolished in June 2017 to make way for the businesses.

The congregation moved to its new home at 1280 Boston Road. The Armenian

Church at Hye Pointe combined St. Gregory the Illuminator Church with Holy Cross Armenian Church of Lawrence. The Lawrence congregation needed a new home. The two parishes officially merged in 2002. It

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Route 125 'restaurant row' booming

New restaurants, established ones share success

MIKE LaBELLA
STAFF WRITER

In recent years, several commercial areas in Haverhill have gotten makeovers, boosting the success of the business community and giving residents more places to shop and dine.

The makeovers have happened in places like Route 125 near the Plaistow line, which has added a variety of new restaurants including the Longhorn Steakhouse, Five Guys Burgers, the 110 Grill and most recently, a Chipotle Mexican Grill.

A Kobe Japanese Steakhouse is poised to open in the area as well.

The new businesses are drawing more customers to this northern "restaurant row," benefiting other companies and the business community as a whole.

While some residents complain about problems such as increased traffic in neighborhoods near the new businesses, the mayor and his planners say the gains far outweigh the problems.

They point to the creation of jobs, more property taxes coming to the city, the modernization of old properties and decrease of blight, and customers getting a greater variety of places to spend their money.

Route 125 near the Plaistow line has been exploding with new businesses. It's an area city officials refer to as Haverhill's



Cars pass restaurants on the busy Route 125 at the Haverhill-Plaistow border which has gained the nickname "restaurant row."

second restaurant row — the downtown Washington Street area is the city's first restaurant row.

On the Route 125 restaurant row, Mr. Mike's restaurant owner Mike Difeo said that when the popular 110 Grill restaurant moved in nearby, he decided to change Mr. Mike's to compete. He invested in renovations, adding an outside dining area and new signage that is capturing the attention of passers-by. Now business is booming at Mr. Mike's.

"Remodeling was huge for us and has increased our curb appeal," Difeo said. "We are a family oriented restaurant and we offer a variety of family specials, such as a dinner for two for \$25, including

two entrees, two sides each, coffee and dessert and our popular Tuesday night prime rib special, which for us is like a busy Friday night. We cook about 16, 16-pound prime ribs and offer a 12-ounce portion for \$12, including any two sides.

"We're very fortunate to have a very large, regular clientele, so we run specials

every week to change things up," Difeo said. "Business has been very good, and everyone in this area seems to be busy, which is great. People are working, the economy is good, the unemployment rate is low and it helps everybody."

City Councilor William Macek said new businesses that have moved onto this



AMANDA SABGA/Staff photos

Mr. Mike's restaurant on Route 125 has undergone a makeover that brought it a new sign, outdoor dining and an expanded indoor dining room.



This Chipotle recently opened near the Haverhill-Plaistow line.



Customers enjoy the 110 Grill on Route 125.

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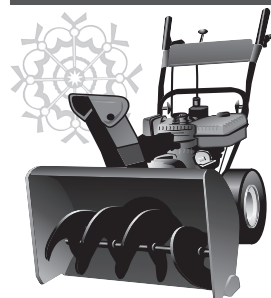
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Mike Difeo, owner of Mr. Mike's restaurant, lowers an umbrella in the new outdoor dining area.

TIM JEAN/
Staff photo

restaurant row and elsewhere in Haverhill not only create more jobs — they also add to the city's tax revenue. He said the city's meals tax strengthens Haverhill's finances.

"This translates into hundreds of thousands of dollars per year for the city, and it's approaching \$1 million annually," Macek said.

"The New Hampshire meals tax is 9 percent, and we also have the advantage because we offer water and sewer," he said. "For many businesses, the cost of installation and maintenance of a septic system and grease traps can be impractical."

Dougan Sherwood, president and CEO of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, said he's excited

about the recent flood of new restaurants into the area of the Haverhill-Plaistow line.

"I love concentrations of energy and activity, so it's no surprise to see these restaurants cluster around themselves," he said.

"What I hope to see is more people not from Haverhill coming to Haverhill and hopefully some of this activity will migrate to the downtown.

"This is all great stuff, so long as it serves to support all of Haverhill and in particular, the restaurants and businesses that are downtown," Sherwood said. "We want to make sure these businesses, as a cluster, are supported in a way that attracts people to other parts of the city."

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HISTORY

■ Continued from Page S3

was the first such merger to take place within the Armenian Apostolic Church in America.

The new parish purchased the 9-acre site off Boston Road in the city's Ward Hill section. There was a catch, however: How was the parish going to finance the construction of a new church?

Parishioners determined the solution was to sell the church building at Main and Winter streets and use the proceeds to pay for the new church. That was easier said than done.

It took 15 years to sell the building and erect the new church. Nearly a decade ago, Burger King tried to put a fast food restaurant at the church location. The city's Board of Appeals rejected that plan in 2010.

In 2016, the church congregation finally found a buyer who demolished the church and built the new business plaza in its place.

The plan faced considerable opposition. The city's Main Street Historic District tried to delay the church's sale and demolition, citing its opposition to the potential creation of a plaza similar to those located farther north on Main Street.

After a proposed ordinance that would have given the city's Historical Commission more say in the demolition of buildings was rejected by the City Council, the parish was able to proceed with the sale of the old church to a developer.

Local real estate agent Stephanie Mann and

Zaharias Iliadis tried to stop the demolition by offering to buy the building from the developer in November 2016. That effort failed.

More than 300 people signed a petition protesting the demolition of the church.

"I was brought up in that church," Mann said. She disputed the contention that St. Gregory the Illuminator needed extensive repairs.

A parishioner put a large amount of money into repairs at the church, including a new roof, she said. Many of the Haverhill members did not want to merge with the Lawrence congregation or raze the church building, according to Mann.

"That church meant so much to the city," she said in a recent interview. The building should have remained a church — and not been demolished, she said.

Just up the street, she pointed out, First Congregational Church sold its building to Brookwood Community Church several years ago.

"They didn't demolish it," she said.

Ever since the demolition, Mann said, she has avoided driving by the site of her old church. It's too painful, she explained.

City Councilors Mary Ellen Daly O'Brien and Thomas Sullivan were critical of the plan to put the plaza with a Domino's Pizza across the street from City Hall.

"It's still not my preference," Daly O'Brien said of the current use of the property, adding, however, that people need to "embrace" the fact that change happens.

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A new look — and a new twist for business

Harbor Place brings fresh commercial approach

MIKE LABELLA
STAFF WRITER

The biggest commercial property makeover in recent years in Haverhill has happened at the eastern entrance to downtown. There, the old Woolworth building was demolished and replaced by Harbor Place, which includes a UMass Lowell satellite campus and a variety of businesses and apartments. The \$70 million 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. “We’ve introduced 54,000 square feet of commercial office space, which has

created vibrant commercial activity in an anchor space at the foot of the Basiliere Bridge,” said Ron Trombley, managing director of the Greater Haverhill Foundation. “The plaza has also created a beautiful destination on the riverfront, with a summer music series last year and Santa’s Village in the HC Media space during the Christmas Stroll, along with ice carvings on the plaza. “The concept is to keep that plaza as a vibrant destination for entertainment on the waterfront,” Trombley said. For decades, the empty Woolworth building stood at the corner of Merrimack and Main streets until it was finally replaced by the attractive, five-story commercial building named Harbor Place and Pentucket Bank Plaza, and an adjacent six-story residential building with



TIM JEAN/Staff photo

The Harbor Place complex towers over the intersection below.

first-floor commercial space. A public boardwalk along the Merrimack River is behind the Harbor Place buildings. HC Media moved into the first floor of the commercial building, while UMass Lowell opened a satellite campus on the second floor. The campus offers bachelor’s degree programs in business, criminal justice and psychology, as well as master’s classes. More courses are planned, college

officials said. The university’s incubator space — called the Innovation Hub or iHub — is located on the third floor and offers office and incubator space for new and growing businesses. As of Jan. 11, eight start-up businesses were members of the iHub community, while five offices are still available along with open co-working space, according to iHub officials. In recent months, the

iHub has hosted a variety of conferences, public hearings and round table discussions, as well as a civic technology competition called “Hack Haverhill,” in its conference and event space. The property has expansive views of Bradford and the Merrimack River. More events are planned throughout the year. Pentucket Bank moved its corporate offices and marketing department to the fourth floor of the

building, while the fifth floor is partly used by MTM Insurance. “There is about 4,000 square feet of unoccupied space behind HC Media that we’re currently working with a strong restaurant prospect to fill,” Trombley said. The Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce recently moved out of the former Landmark Building on Merrimack Street and has joined the iHub. Chamber officials said

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AMANDA SABGA/Staff photo

Dougan Sherwood, president of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, in the chamber's new offices at Harbor Place overlooking the eastern gateway to downtown.

People enjoy the boardwalk along the river behind Harbor Place.

TIM JEAN/
Staff photo



that by leveraging the full suite of iHub resources — including offices, conference rooms, event space, faculty collaborations and access to UMass Lowell's expansive resources — the chamber is well positioned to expand its programs and help speed up economic growth in Greater Haverhill.

Chamber President and CEO Dougan Sherwood said, "2019 will be a big year for our chamber and I couldn't have imagined a better way to kick things off. Our new space is

perfect for us and it was really special to have old friends and new come together. I really love the energy Haverhill has right now."

The Harbor Place residential building's ground floor commercial space on Merrimack Street is about to have a new tenant. A company called The Compound will offer weightlifting and specialized physical training. Trombley said that new business is poised to open sometime in February, while the remaining space is being targeted

for a retail/commercial customer.

The next phase of Harbor Place is a six floor, 54-unit market rate apartment building.

"We're working hard towards breaking ground as soon as possible, subject to final state permitting," Trombley said. "The idea is to create a separate identity as the backside of the new building will have a distinctive and different curved styling, which will create an interesting facade as you walk around it."

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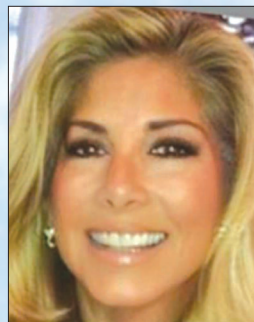
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RiversEdge Plaza gets new life

BY PAUL TENNANT
STAFF WRITER

The RiversEdge Plaza, located on Lincoln Avenue between Riverside Park and the recently built Groveland Bridge that carries Route 97 into Groveland, is gaining new economic life.

A new CVS opened in the plaza in 2016 and construction is expected to start soon on a Burger King restaurant. The Registry of Motor Vehicles moved its service center from the basement of City Hall to the plaza in September.

The vast plaza lot offers Registry customers many more spaces in which to leave their cars than the cramped City Hall parking lot. The Registry is using space that CVS occupied until that store moved into the new building in the northwestern corner of the plaza.

A new restaurant, Oyummy Asian Bistro, opened at the plaza in February and business has been very good, according to the manager, John Li. He said he has a very optimistic outlook on the plaza, which dates back to the 1960s.

Despite being in operation for less than a year, Oyummy has already built up a strong base of customers, Li said.

"They like that it (the restaurant) is very clean and they never complain about the food," he said.

Kim Chin, owner of Lincoln Cleaners which has been at the plaza for many years, said he is pleased with the increased commercial activity there.

"It's good," he said.

Chin, whose cleaning business is near the former Building 19 store, which is now vacant, said he would like to see that property

rejuvenated with a new store.

Harry's Liquors has also been at the plaza for many years. Greg Charshoodian, an affable cashier at the store who seems to know every customer, has worked there for 17 years.

The business has continued to be "stable" over the years, he said.

The dominant store in RiversEdge Plaza is Market Basket, one of three such supermarkets in Haverhill. Market Basket has been at the eastern end of the plaza for more than 20 years.

The other anchor store in the plaza for many years was Building 19, which sold a wide variety of goods at discount prices. That store closed in December 2013 and the property remains vacant.

Mayor James Fiorentini and his administration have been trying to get a new business to



RYAN HUTTON/Staff photo

The Burger King under construction in the plaza parking lot.

take over the former Building 19 space at the western end of RiversEdge. The mayor at one time hoped to turn the plaza into a "lifestyle mall" which would allow shoppers to walk between shops.

"We had tried to get the three different groups that own the plaza together to work on this, but then the recession hit," Fiorentini said of the effort that happened several years ago.

Other businesses at RiversEdge Plaza include a Dunkin' Donuts which has been there for many years, an Aubochon hardware store, a ceramics workshop, Super-Cuts, a Dollar Tree, a CardsMart that's been in business for 10 years, Haverhill House of Pizza, a Subway that's been operating for five years, and Emily's Bakery.

The new Burger King will be next to the Dunkin' Donuts.

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