

Good for Lynn, good for the region

It calls itself the "gateway to the North Shore," but for too many years, Lynn has been regarded more as the region's forgotten back door.

Those who live in communities beyond the Nahant causeway regard it as a grimy, industrial city that's too far from the regional highways to be worth visiting. But the city's planners and elected officials hope to change that with an ambitious plan to develop some 300 acres between the busy Lynnway (Route 1A) and a waterfront that's been little used, primarily because it's the right of way for National Grid's power lines.

The first step is moving those lines, which will require a considerable investment on the part of the utility, other property owners, the state and the city. But once that's accomplished, Lynn officials envision a major redevelopment effort that relies in large measure on strengthening the city's ties with its neighbors on the North Shore.

Indeed, one of the slides displayed during a recent presentation on the waterfront plan showed the "Lynn Ferry" — the words superimposed on a picture of the popular Salem ferry. City officials would like to establish maritime links with both Salem and Boston, and see its train station, which — unlike Salem's — is already equipped with a spacious parking garage, become a regional transportation hub.

There are many connections already between Lynn and the communities to the north and east.

■ Last week's presentation on the waterfront plan was hosted by the North Shore Chamber of Commerce and held in the gymnasium on the Lynn campus of North Shore Community College, which is headquartered in Danvers. (Wayne Burton, who chairs the chamber's board and is president of the community college, has been a major advocate on Lynn's behalf.)

■ Salem's Highland Avenue has become a major shopping destination for Lynn residents, Salem Hospital is Lynn's primary medical resource, and Salem State College provides educational opportunity for hundreds of Lynn residents every year.

■ Lynn, with an impressive history of its own, is part of the Essex National Heritage Area, whose governing commission will meet at the Lynn Museum next month.

■ Lynn has the largest population of any community along the coast north of Boston and the largest supply of low-cost housing. Many of its residents work in businesses in surrounding cities and towns. Conversely, General Electric's jet aircraft plant in Lynn remains one of the economic powerhouses for the entire region.

The waterfront plan, which has the enthusiastic support of the city's mayor, City Council and legislative delegation, holds great promise with its vision of mixed-use development, including housing, restaurants and stores, offering views out toward the Atlantic Ocean.

During a recent visit, Gov. Deval Patrick called it an opportunity unique to Massachusetts. If it succeeds, not only Lynn, but the entire North Shore, will benefit.

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