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State OKs work on sea wall

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By Abbe Smith, Register Staff

WEST HAVEN — The city has received an official green light to move forward on repairing the rotting wooden sea wall on New Haven Harbor off Water Street.

Mayor John M. Picard confirmed recently that he has received approval from the state Department of Environmental Protection for the bulkhead project. He said a formal approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is on its way.

Rebuilding the sea wall is a necessary step in preparing the waterfront property, which is in the West River Crossing area, so it can be marketed to developers.

“This is a really huge step in a project that has been talked about for 25 years,” Picard said. “I think the bulkhead is a great thing.”

While the formal approvals are good news, Picard said the city still has to find an estimated \$1.8 million to finance the project. He vowed to lobby for the money.

“I have been lobbying all along our federal and state legislators,” he said, adding, “I think this project will create more jobs, create tax revenue and help keep the businesses that we have.”

The 1,400-foot sea wall, or bulkhead, is meant to keep land from washing into New Haven Harbor, but West Haven’s is badly in need of repair.

The disappearing sea wall poses several problems. For one, land that is slowly eroding into the channel poses a major navigation hazard for boats, not to mention the possibility of chunks from the bulkhead bobbing just below the surface.

The city only plans to repair a short section of the bulkhead that sits off the city-owned 10 Water St. property. To repair the entire bulkhead would be too costly.

Picard said a year ago the DEP told the city it would not allow a new bulkhead to be built off of Water Street. DEP spokesman Dwayne Gardner has said that the state discourages constructing new bulkheads because of the impact on the environment, but occasionally permits it.

Picard said the state changed its mind about West Haven’s bulkhead after his staff met with DEP staff over the matter.

“This is crucial to the development of the West River Crossing project,” he said.

The city’s vision for the West River Crossing area includes a possible marina, hotel, restaurants and stores. A year ago, the city demolished the final building at the old Connecticut Refining Co. site at 105 Water St., a step toward its goal of

making 15 to 20 acres ready for development.

The city owns about five acres and hopes to acquire more land as it becomes available.

Contact Abbe Smith at 203-789-5615. or at asmith@newhavenregister.com.

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