

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **Rolling on the riverfront**

Representing both Longmeadow and part of Springfield, I firmly believe that our town of Longmeadow depends on the prosperity of Springfield in order to thrive. The Connecticut River flows through both municipalities, and is part of our first view of the city when we drive north on Route 5. This week's column travels to the north of Longmeadow to consider that gateway to Springfield.

Springfield's riverfront, the long stretch beside the Connecticut River, is a natural asset that has not filled its potential as an asset to the city. We have had the expectation for years that it should be a showplace, but it continues to languish. Circumstances over the past few years have finally positioned the city to make the most of that asset.

The city has been looking at tourism as a growth opportunity for the coming years, and an attractive riverfront is one advantage that can distinguish Springfield from other cities. The general desire for development has been in place for years, but it took a precipitating factor to give impetus to that desire. The push came with an action by the board of directors of the Basketball hall of Fame, the most prominent business in the neighborhood.

The board announced that the Hall of Fame might leave Springfield unless new development came to the neighborhood. With that challenge in place, Springfield and Boston both heightened our interest in the river. These are the latest developments.

First is the tourist information center. Although Vermont welcomes motorists at the border with a tourist center, Massachusetts has never provided an information center for interstate travelers on Route 1-91. We have long needed a facility that welcomes motorists and dispenses information about local attractions. Years ago the talk was of putting such a center in Longmeadow, but that never happened. Then the discussions moved to a Springfield site, but highway access was a problem. Just last year, an agreement was reached between city, state, and private parties. We will have a center in the south end of Springfield that is located to facilitate access to the Hall of Fame.

Second, is the Hall of Fame project itself. The facility wants an enlarged facility that may include college players. New capital is needed in order to provide that growth, and the hall of Fame is asking for a sizable state contribution to the endeavor. We recognize the importance of the facility to the entire region, while at the same time realizing that it is a private enterprise. At this time, discussions are ongoing. Some improvements were authorized by the House of Representatives just last week when we approved \$15,000,000 worth of infrastructure work for road and sewer relocation.

A third riverfront factor is the York Street Jail, a property that still holds the possibility of development by the Royal Armories. Initial negotiations were promising, and local officials await further action from British entrepreneurs. None of these developments can happen until Bondi's Island odors are controlled, and the city has made substantial progress on that front. When the proposals mature, both Longmeadow and Springfield will be well on the way to a bright future for this gateway city.