

Boost for Ides Hill plan

Monday, July 27, 2009

ATTLEBORO - Efforts to revive the nearly bankrupt industrial business park project are on track, Mayor Kevin Dumas said Friday.

"I accomplished exactly what I hoped to accomplish," the mayor said as he headed home after a whirlwind week of meetings with city, state and federal officials on the cash-strapped project the city took over from the Attleboro Redevelopment Authority just last week.

It was his administration's first week on the job of managing the cash-poor and problem-plagued 189-acre park that's \$3 million to \$4 million in debt, but is taking shape slowly nonetheless in the shadow of Ides Hill off County street.

"We're going to start again first thing Monday morning," Dumas said.

One key task, a meeting to convince a Warwick, R.I., seafood company to move into the park went "very well," he said in a five-page news release detailing efforts for the week. The city submitted a draft purchase and sales agreement and a draft jobs agreement to company officials. Both are being reviewed by the firm's attorneys.

Dumas said the company, which wants to buy a lot big enough for expansion, is expected to produce 32 to 34 jobs.

Selling a parcel will help get cash following into ARA coffers so the organization can start to pay off its park debt.

Meanwhile, a meeting with an official from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development garnered a pledge that new jobs generated by the seafood firm would count toward the job creation requirement for both the industrial business park and downtown revitalization.

That, in turn, will get sanctions against spending HUD money on the projects lifted.

A session with the state Highway Department brought some good news.

Cost overruns for the park's main road, Commerce Way, were lower than thought. The deficit was pegged at \$294,000 rather than \$376,000.

About \$100,000 of that amount will be transferred to a separate project, the reconstruction of Tiffany Street Phase II, which brings the overruns down to about \$194,000, Dumas said.

The city still needs to come up with a \$322,000 match before it can use a \$458,000

federal grant that expires at the end of August.

Dumas said he hopes to use state economic development money for the match.