

Cleanup begins on borough property

Medical center to be built on downtown site

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NAUGATUCK — The second attempt to clean up a vacant piece of prime commercial property downtown is finally under way, and officials believe it will be done correctly this time.

Workers from an environmental cleanup company began digging out contamination that has been buried on the site known as Parcel C, on the corner of Maple and Water streets, for more than 50 years. The property needs to be cleaned before anything can be built on it, and the job is expected to be complete by the end of the summer, Mayor Robert A. Mezzo said.

Mezzo hopes the cleanup will pave the way for groundbreaking on a \$710 million downtown revitalization project called Renaissance Place. Under the original plan for Renaissance Place, development of Parcel C was not supposed to begin for several years. But a slow economy made it difficult for the developer, Alexius Conroy, to line up funding to purchase privately owned properties downtown. So Conroy and his vice president of operations, Michael O'Connor, reached out to Saint Mary's Hospital, which now plans to build a state-of-the-art medical complex on Parcel C.

The land is now fenced off while bulldozers, backhoes and other machines dig out volatile organic compounds, petroleum and other contaminants. That means business owners are losing out on parking spaces on *See PARCEL , Page 5B*

PARCEL: Step closer to Renaissance Place

Continued from 1B

Parcel C, and the annual Duck Day and Race, which draws about 10,000 people to downtown Naugatuck on a Sunday every spring, will have to find a new location.

But those are small prices to pay to have the land cleaned and ready for development, business leaders say.

Lynn G. Ward, president and CEO of the Waterbury Regional Chamber, which runs the Duck Race, said she's pleased, although plans for the race will be changed. Ground zero for the event has been Parcel C for four years.

"We realize that with the development of Parcel C our event is going to have to be shaped a little differently," she said. "But we're happy to do it for economic development, and we will still have a wonderful, vibrant event."

Business leader Diane Troiano said she is excited to see the ground dug up across the street from her business. She is co-owner of the popular Nardelli's Grinder Shoppe on Maple Street, one of few Naugatuck businesses downtown that has thrived since major industries left over the past 30 years.

"It's great to see it cleaned up," she said. "It would be nice to see something go in there because it's such a wonderful piece of property."

Though it's quality land, the 2.2-acre tract where rubber was once made has sat vacant for more than 20 years as borough officials argued over what to do with it. Several plans have fallen by the wayside.

Cleanup efforts have also fallen short.

About eight years ago, Naugatuck paid Handex Consulting and Remediation \$500,000 to clean all of Parcel C, but officials later found the company only cleaned about half of the land. The borough recouped \$275,000 from the company. That money will be put toward the latest cleanup.

The project will cost about \$1.4 million, and the borough has all but \$120,000 of that. It is seeking state grant funding to offset the rest.

Mezzo said the cleanup will be great for the downtown business climate.

"With a completely clean Parcel C, we can move forward with developing that land," he said. "It's a piece of flat land that is publicly owned along Route 8. I challenge anyone to find many pieces of land that match that description in a downtown in the Valley."