

Construction under way on new Howland bridge

BY NICK SAMBIDES JR.

BDN STAFF

BDN 4-28-11

HOWLAND — As town leaders wait to hear if the town has won about \$325,000 in grants to raze the former Howland Tannery and beautify its site, construction of the nearby \$10 million Howland bridge is under way and will revitalize downtown in a way not seen in decades, officials said.

Workers from Cianbro Corp. were pouring the first concrete abutments to the bridge Wednesday and town officials were awaiting word on the grants, Town Manager Jane Jones said.

Not that work has ceased on revitalizing what once was the town's primary economic engine. Starting next week, the installation of a walking trail along the Penobscot River and through the tannery site will begin, as will the planting of vegetation around the trail. Also due to start shortly is construction of a new boat ramp, with all of the tannery site projects expected to be finished by July 1, Jones said.

"That date is very optimistic," Jones said Wednesday. "But if everything cooperates, we are hoping to see it happen by then or sometime in July."

Rainy and snowy weather has delayed the site improvements so far this year, Jones said. Work

on a nearby skating rink, another area improvement, finished months ago.

Once home to the town's largest employer, the tannery site is part of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust's plans to build a fish bypass, green some tannery land, and dig a channel for the bypass in a project designed to open nearly 1,000 miles of habitat to Atlantic salmon, alewives and other sea-run fish now blocked from migrating upriver. The project was permitted last year.

As part of the project, town officials are developing once-contaminated land not occupied by the bypass. The town was awarded a \$600,000 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant in May 2009 to pay for the removal of contaminants left on three shoreline spots. Cleanup work began last year.

The walking trail, boat launch and site vegetation are covered by the grant, Jones said. The cleanup began in July and likely will finish this spring. More than 50 tons of contaminated site soil have been taken to the Juniper Ridge Landfill in Old Town for storage.

Of the \$325,400 in grants the town is seeking, a \$200,000 federal EPA grant would help fund the razing of the tannery and the removal of two areas where contaminants have settled,

Jones said. That project, which has an estimated \$389,000 cost, is expected to start this summer. It was unclear how town officials would make up the difference.

Another grant town officials seek, for \$125,400, would allow for an upgrade of the amenities found along the walking trail, including more or better benches or lighting, Jones said.

Though an entirely separate project, the bridge construction, like the tannery work, will provide residents with a psychological boost and help show potential investors that the town is moving forward, Jones said.

"Both of them are wonderful projects for the town," Jones said of the razing and bridge work. "They are both very needed remediations or upgrades. They both help improve the developability of that lot, if that is even the word, which is what the Board [of Selectmen] is looking for."

Under the Maine Department of Transportation-approved plan, the old bridge will be used until 2012 and razed in 2013, with the new bridge — which is due to be finished next year — standing between the old one and the dam nearby. Workers will continue to build temporary structures, abutments and bulkheads, as part of the project.