

## Proposal seeks to expand Port of Providence

The \$28-million plan calls for the redevelopment of a former landfill, extension of rail lines and the purchase of two specialized cranes.

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PROVIDENCE — City and port officials shared with state lawmakers their vision to expand and modernize ProvPort, one of two deepwater marine terminals in New England, on a tour of the city waterfront yesterday.

The \$28-million-plus plan calls for the redevelopment of the former city landfill along Narragansett Bay, the extension of existing Providence-Worcester railways lines, and the purchase of two specialized cranes to handle shipping containers.

If completed, the port improvements would boost the Allens Avenue terminal's capacity by 30 percent, allowing more cargo to come through the port annually and more blue-collar jobs.

"Ships don't want to wait for weeks and weeks to come into port," said Bruce Waterson, who

as president of Waterson Terminal Services handles the day-to-day operations at the port. "We need to be able to get materials on and off the ships, move [ships] out, and get the materials on rails.... If we can move more volume, we can create more jobs."

The state legislators in attendance were part of a joint House and Senate study commission examining the potential of economic development and job creation at Rhode Island's ports. Yesterday's tour was the group's first official field trip.

"We're looking for economic opportunities for the state and what we saw here is extremely impressive. Only a minority of our colleagues realize what's going on down here," said House Majority Whip Peter F. Kilmartin, D-Pawtucket, who co-chairs the commission, following the tour. "It's a big infrastructure and it looks like there are good jobs.... Given what's going on here, it is a wonderful idea to increase the size of the port. It's the best use of the land."

The commission will visit the

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## Port

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ports of Quonset, Galilee, and Newport in the coming months and is expected to release a preliminary report in September.

Located at the convergence of the Providence River and Narragansett Bay, the 105-acre marine terminal is operated by a private nonprofit agency, ProvPort Inc., under a long-term lease from the city dating back to 1994.

The more than 100 ships that pulled into the port each year provide 1,000 direct jobs for Rhode Islanders, 1,500 indirect jobs through services related to the port industries, and over \$200 million in economic activity, according to Waterson.

Major tenants at the port include New England Petroleum, which distributes diesel and home-heating oil regionally, Schnitzer Northeast, which is among the largest exporters of scrap steel in the United States, and Abou Merhi Lines, a Beirut-based used-auto exporter that serves markets in West Africa and the Middle East.

"We are an economic engine for the state and the city," Waterson said.

But with the port nearly 80-percent occupied, ProvPort wants to expand, and it is finding prime waterfront land scarce. Johnson & Wales University, in particular, has established a sizable campus not far from the terminal and has plans for further expansion. "We don't have unlimited opportunities," said Waterson. "A lot of the land that was available to us in the '60s and '70s is not available now."

Recently, the port and the city have begun negotiating a lease of the 12-acre former city landfill, at the head of the Bay.

City Director of Planning Thomas Deller said the city has offered a reduced lease in return for the port capping the landfill and paying for other infrastructure improvements on the land. The development of the former landfill would provide space to extend existing rail lines servicing the port.

A planned rail loop from Allens Avenue to the waterfront would cost \$1.2 million and speed the process of loading and unloading materials from ships.

And ProvPort officials still want to take on shipping-container traffic from cargo barges, an idea that was pushed under the administration of Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. For this, they are eyeing an 8-acre parcel at the port entrance that National Grid has put up for sale as well as a 7-acre parcel owned by the Izzo family near the former landfill.

At least one of those parcels could be used as a container yard. A majority of the 3.1 tons of cargo that came through the port last year consisted of bulk materials, such as coal, cement and road salt, which do not come in shipping containers.

The port is also considering spending \$24 million on two new cranes to replace two currently leased from a New Jersey firm. Two container cranes purchased by the city in 1968 are obsolete and have fallen into disuse. "They're really just scrap on legs at this point," said Waterson.

Money for all those improvements could potentially come from federal loans for economic development projects in areas of high unemployment that will be provided through President Obama's economic recovery plan. The details of that loan program are still in development, according to Deller.