

Sun is shining on Hercules plans

William J. Healy II has said since his days on the campaign trail last year that he would spend much of his time as mayor encouraging economic development. So there is nowhere he would rather have been Thursday morning, less than three months into the job, than standing off Market Avenue S in the spring sunshine. He was there to preside over the announcement of a major step forward for one of the biggest projects in Canton's history.

State officials, agreeing with developer Bob Timken, envision a bright, profitable future for the sprawling, long-vacant former Hercules Engine plant. Toward that end, the Ohio Department of Development has approved tax credits of about \$36 million for development of the site.

Timken, a partner in Cormony Development of Rockville, Md., has said that the plans call for redeveloping 600,000 square feet of space for offices, housing, retail stores and exhibition space. His hope is that successful development of the 26-acre site will spark development of the property immediately around it. And it would stretch the central business district into what Timken calls an "events district" all the way to the Cultural Center for the Arts some 20 blocks north.

Obtaining the historic preservation tax credits is a goal dating to the administration of Healy's predecessor, Janet Weir Creighton, which last year secured \$3 million in state funds for the environmental cleanup of the site. Healy has enthusiastically supported the project, as well, though, so the developers are assured of continued cooperation by the city.

"This is huge," the mayor said of the progress announced Thursday. Yes, it is. Successful completion of this ambitious project would give the city an unparalleled anchor and southern gateway to downtown.

Thursday was a sunny day in Canton in more ways than one.

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