Brockton leads the way in state Gateway Cities initiative

Gateway Cities leaders discuss Brockton's future

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BROCKTON — Mayor James E. Harrington stood at Centre and Commercial streets Wednesday, loft-style housing in a renovated factory before him and commuter rail tracks behind him.

They are steps to bringing back downtown Brockton, a process that city and state leaders are hoping will flourish with participation in the state's Gateway Cities initiative.

Gateway Cities is a coalition of 11 cities across the commonwealth, united to bring attention to their needs and to gain power as a voting block in the state Legislature. Harrington was the first mayor to sign on.

On Wednesday, leaders of the Gateway Cities Legislative Caucus joined local legislators, business leaders and city officials in touring an area of the downtown district, then gathering for a discussion of the city’s plans, needs and hopes.

John Merian, chairman of the Downtown Brockton Association, was hopeful that the network established under Gateway Cities would benefit the city and especially redevelopment of downtown.

“They know Brockton is on the cusp of taking redevelopment to another level and they see it can be done very easily,” Merian said.

Key to the downtown redevelopment is the continued presence of state offices. Both the Plymouth County district attorney and state Department of Social Services are at risk of leaving downtown offices — moves that city and state officials and business leaders say could be devastating.

Merian said it was clear to him that Gateway Cities Caucus leaders and a representative from Gov. Deval Patrick’s office understood the magnitude of the issue.

“They acknowledged, as the state is pouring all this money in, it makes total sense to maintain what’s already there as well,” Merian said. “The mayor pushed it, the legislators pushed it, the Gateway Cities Caucus leaders definitely went away with a good feeling of the importance of having government agencies in the center of the city.”

Those who gathered around the conference table at the Brockton Public Library also heard that the city needs support for English-as-a-second-language courses for immigrants, public safety, public transportation, expansion of higher education and more.

Local leaders were buoyed by the Gateway Cities agenda and the prospect of a voting block to get legislation passed for housing, business and more.

“If we get half of this, we’re pretty happy,” Harrington said.