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New Bedford waterfront to get a \$145 million cleanup

Toxic sediment to be dredged, put in plastic on banks of Acushnet River

BOSTON (AP) — New Bedford's North End residents may soon be able to use their waterfront again, after decades of industrial pollution and years of health warnings that kept people away.

A cleanup proposal to be detailed this week by federal officials means the city may soon reclaim its waterfront. The planned \$145 million cleanup would remove heavily contaminated sediments from the bottom of the Acushnet River.

The proposal was delayed for four years by controversy over the Environmental Protection Agency's previous proposal to

incinerate the most contaminated sediments.

The new plan calls for 450,000 cubic yards of toxic sediment to be dredged from the river and placed in giant plastic-lined containers along the riverbank. After the sediment settles, the containers could be covered with a material such as clay, allowing the city to build recreation areas and possibly a maritime terminal on top of them.

"We have come a long way from the kind of confrontational situation we had with their insistence on incineration," City Council president George Rogers told the Boston Globe.

Rogers led the fight three years ago against the incineration plan, despite EPA threats of a \$25,000-per-day fine. The uproar over the proposal to burn some of the most highly contaminated sediment forced the agency to shelve the 1992 dredging plan.

"Everyone was so focused on the incinerator that we decided it was better to wait," said EPA

spokeswoman Kristen Conroy.

The new dredging proposal, expected to be announced Wednesday, is the result of the ensuing two years of negotiations and reflects a remarkable turnaround from the battles of 1993 between the city and the EPA.

It includes several changes from the 1992 proposal to address local concerns.

The EPA agreed to remove even more material than in the previous plan, and to keep it out of a lagoon where osprey and other wildlife congregate. Instead, the material will go into four massive in-ground tanks that can one day be built over.

In fact, Rogers is spearheading a campaign to develop the spot into a riverfront recreation area next to what would have been the incinerator site using some of the \$21 million that the river's polluters put into a trust for environmental projects.