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State moves forward on South Terminal

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NEW BEDFORD — The Legislature has approved a land swap for the South Terminal project, providing further momentum to the proposed port development that leaders say will create thousands of jobs in SouthCoast.

The late-in-the-session swap clears a potential block to development, giving the city about 3 acres of Division of Marine Fisheries land near the proposed site in exchange for about 2 acres of city land on South Rodney French Boulevard.

"Given the closeness of the home rule petition's filing to July 31, the odds were against passage. It took a concerted effort by the city's delegation to get this done by today," Sen. Mark C.W. Montigny, D-New Bedford, said in a statement.

The Legislature was also expected to approve \$4.5 million in earmarks for the project as part of the state's transportation bond bill. The money would be used for a freight rail extension and better roads on the site.

As of late Tuesday, the Legislature had not yet released that bill, according to legislative aides.

Lt. Gov. Tim Murray and Mayor Jon Mitchell touted the land swap for the South Terminal project as evidence of the state's commitment to development in SouthCoast at a press conference Tuesday morning, which focused on turning Custom House Square into a park.

"Another item off the inaugural punch list!" said Murray, who could later be seen walking with the mayor in the direction of Celtic Coffee House.

City officials said preliminary sketches of the park would be available in about a month. The Planning Board will hold at least two public meetings about the project, which the city hopes to complete by June 2013.

Erik Prince of Stoss Urban Design said the firm, which is designing the project pro bono, has been researching the old whaling routes in search of interesting plants for the park.

"It might look really simple but really be enriched by plantings," he said. "It's probably not going to be a lot of design elements."

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