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Many summer projects in the Lewiston-Auburn region are starting to heat up

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Maine has experienced one of the warmest and sunniest summers on record. Despite weather more conducive to basking in the sun than basking in the glory of recent development projects, nevertheless, here are some of the brightest initiatives taking place in Lewiston-Auburn.

The former Maine Central Railroad depot, which had lain dormant for years, received a new lease on life by local developer Bob Roy, Jr. The project, named Ironhorse Court, is located near Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The community was invited to see the renovations at an open house in late spring. Part of the structure includes a marvelous open gathering space called the Royal Oak Room, which has huge windows and a restored lobby similar to the way it looked back in 1916.

The upper floor contains tin ceilings and wood detailing, accentuating a classic early 20th century building (though modern plumbing and electrical work add modern conveniences). A small warehouse next door can be converted to parking.

Another former rail station, the Grand Trunk Depot, will receive additional money for its planned facelift. The Lewiston-Auburn Railroad Company received a commitment from the City of Lewiston for a \$115,800 Community Development Block Grant allocation to help redevelop the facility on Lewiston's Lincoln Street. A total of \$370,000 in financial assistance will be used to redevelop the property, including a \$200,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant (which was announced several months ago in the NEREJ), the \$115,800 CDBG grant, and \$55,000 from LARC coffers. A business prospect intends to open a railroad-themed restaurant at the depot.

Meanwhile, readers of this column also know that the Auburn Industrial Park has been growing steadily in property acquisitions as well as tenants. On July 13, the Auburn Planning Board approved a final plan for a proposed eight-lot park subdivision of about 100 acres to be located off Lewiston Junction Rd. That will allow the Auburn Business Development Corporation to expand the park and continue marketing land suited to companies that require easy access to rail, highway, or airport, as well as use of a General Purpose Foreign Trade Zone.

The Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport will receive \$500,000 in federal funding for a runway extension. The allocation will be used to fund data collection, preliminary design work, permitting and an environmental assessment as first steps in the extension of Runway 4-22. The airport has been identified by the FAA as having operations that require a 6,000 foot runway, which is 1,000 feet more than it currently has. In 2008, the airport had over 75,000 operations.

At the Bates Mill Complex, developer Tom Platz announced he would work with Portland-based Maine Workforce Housing to develop apartment units at Bates Mill No. 2, part of the downtown Bates Mill Complex that is home to a number of businesses and restaurants. The new housing, the first project of its kind at an L-A mill, will consist of 52 units, and will offer wi-fi access, a fitness

room, a media room, and heated storage.

The Lewiston Sun Journal reported that 18 of the apartments will be one-bedroom units at market rate, or about \$640 a month including utilities and a parking spot. The remaining 34 apartments will be one- to three-bedroom units for modest-income renters. Assuming it secures financing, Maine Workforce Housing will acquire 40 percent of Mill No. 2 from Platz and plans to start construction of what it calls The Lofts at Bates Mill next summer. The Lofts should open in early 2012.

The Sun Journal also reported that the apartments will feature 12-and-a-half-foot ceilings, exposed timber framing, and large windows.

A dozen organic farmers have started Maine Organic Milling, Maine's only organic grain mill. With ingredients from the Midwest and Canada, they will distribute the grain among themselves and other small organic farmers. Operating out of a former Blue Seal mill in Auburn, they aim to eventually distribute the organic feed throughout New England. The facility is accessible to rail, and consists of a loading and weighing station and storage tanks for feed.

Lastly, Bedard Medical, a successful (and increasingly rare) independent pharmacy and medical products distributor, announced it would expand its operations and relocate to a former retail operation on Minot Ave. in Auburn. The project will include corporate offices, warehousing, and retail operations.

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