

Vallee announces \$1M grant for Franklin

By Joyce Kelly/Daily News staff

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FRANKLIN - Even in the midst of a recession, state Rep. James E. Vallee, D-Franklin, knows how to secure money for his towns: "persistence and tenacity."

"You wear them down. Essentially, you just keep running at them, and hopefully you can convince them," said Vallee, the new House majority leader.

After five years of pushing, Vallee said Franklin has been awarded \$1 million in state funds for improvements to downtown. That money is separate from a \$5 million federal grant.

The \$1 million, available through a public works economic development grant, will pay for improvements to Main Street, Dean Avenue, Depot Street to Ray Street, and a municipal parking lot on Depot Street, Vallee said.

Franklin leaders faced challenges in getting the funds, Vallee said, particularly because the road had been rebuilt in the 1990s.

"So the state had to seriously consider whether to release more money" for more work to the same road, he said, but leaders were able to make a strong case to the Executive Office of Transportation.

"One million dollars is a lot of money right now," Vallee said.

Nodding his head in agreement, Town Administrator Jeffrey D. Nutting said, "It's huge."

The extra grant money will enable the town to improve sidewalks, public parking areas, as well as the streets, Nutting said.

The federal grant is targeted for improvements to Rte. 140, he said.

"We're hoping to get legislation for underground utilities on East Main Street and Central Street, so this saves the town from spending on street improvements," Nutting said.

Town Council Chairman Christopher Feeley noted some of the progress that has already been made - like the renovated building where Cafe Dolce recently set up shop, at 17 East Central St.

"In 2001, this was an abandoned, dilapidated building," Feeley said.

Feeley said he is "ecstatic" about the \$1 million grant.

"We've been waiting for this for five years, which is when we submitted the original application," Feeley said.

It will provide some of the parking people have been concerned about, improve downtown's appearance and make the area more pedestrian-friendly, Feeley said.

"People can see the town and state is investing in downtown, and hopefully they will, too," he said.

Said Vallee, "The objective is economic development. The downtown - I don't think it's too harsh to say - the streetscaping is a little tired."

In towns like Salem, where utilities are underground and the sidewalks are made of brick, downtowns are appealing to developers, he said.

"That encourages people to invest in properties," he said.

It will be 18 to 24 months before residents see any visible work done through the grant money, Nutting said.

Joyce Kelly can be reached at 508-634-7582 or jkelly@cnc.com. This story and others about Franklin can be found at www.milforddailynews.com.