

Shipyard's biggest building going up without delay

Harbor Walk afoot; Shipyard draws herd of catamarans

By Ethan Andrews | Sep 20, 2011



Maine Coast Construction erects the first steel girders of a new 55-foot tall, 22,000-square-foot boat repair shop at Front Street Shipyard, Sept. 16. Current plans show the shipyard moving into the building before Thanksgiving.

Photo by: Ethan Andrews

BELFAST — In the rapid development of Front Street Shipyard from derelict sardine cannery to large-scale boat servicing facility, the past month has been no exception as construction gets under way on two new buildings, including the largest proposed for the property, a 55-foot-tall, 22,000-square-foot repair shop.

The first steel girders of the building went up Friday, Sept. 16 on a massive foundation at the south end of the property, near the municipal wastewater treatment plant. Last week much of the adjacent property was crowded with stacks of girders and trusses suggesting the inspiration for the classic Erector Set — each piece waiting to be bolted into place.

The new building will have two massive bays with doors tall enough that the shipyard's 40-foot-tall mobile travel lift will be able to carry ships directly into the building. Shipyard managing partner JB Turner said the plan is to move into the building before



[View More...](#)

Thanksgiving.

On Sept. 16, the shed at the opposite end of the property that serves as the offices for Front Street Shipyard was crowded with people working on computers and going over plans.

Turner, who spent much of the spring alone in that very building, said the business currently has around 25 employees, working in trades ranging from fiberglass construction to painting, and carpentry to design. That number could jump to 50 or 60 with a large job, he said.

Repair jobs have accounted for the majority of the work done at the shipyard to date, but boatbuilding, which was always couched as a part of the long-term plan, seems likely to start up sooner than expected.

Looking over drawings of a yacht by the venerable yacht design firm Sparkman & Stephens, for which Front Street Shipyard has been pitched as the builder, Turner acknowledged that building boats wasn't supposed to happen quite this soon.

"We can't help it," he said.

Between two existing buildings on the property a new workshop is under construction in which the shipyard hopes to manufacture Southport Boats, a line of small motorboats owned by Front Street Shipyard principal Kenneth Priest's Kenway Corp., where Turner worked prior to the shipyard development.

The shipyard is still on tap to manufacture a line of aluminum-hulled fan boats, designed for the Coast Guard by a Virginia Beach company in order to do ice rescues on the Great Lakes. The owner of the company brought a prototype of the boat to Belfast last month, and according to Turner, is currently waiting for the Coast Guard to issue a Request For Quotation.

At the north end of the shipyard property, workers have leveled the ground where the sardine cannery once stood and also erected a retaining wall elevating the foundation for a new building that Turner said would likely be built next summer, and used primarily for storage.

Another building is planned on the site of a wooden structure just south of the old cannery that was demolished earlier this year, but Turner said he didn't know when it would be built, adding that quotes from builders had been coming in higher than he had anticipated.

Around these two planned buildings, construction has begun on a segment of the Belfast Harbor Walk, a pedestrian and bicycle promenade slated to run between Steamboat Landing and the footbridge.

The Harbor Walk is a city project funded in part by the Maine Department of Transportation, and was originally planned to follow the old Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad tracks but was rerouted over the water on a new pier to avoid splitting the Shipyard property down the middle.

The pier will also serve as an access way to a new marina to be built by the shipyard between the footbridge and the slips surrounding the shipyard's travel lift pier. Turner said he hopes to bring plans for the marina to the city a month from now.

Turner said the shipyard has been doing more work than he had expected to be doing by this point, but is still looking for new business.

"The summer was busier than we thought and Irene was a big player in that," he said.

One of the notable consequences of the tropical storm was that Front Street Shipyard became a magnet for every large catamaran in the area, apparently because the shipyard's travel lift was the only one big enough to haul the double-wide vessels out of the water. Once they were out, many of the owners decided to have work done before heading south.

"It's been great so far, and certainly Belfast has been super," Turner said, noting that people continually stop in and express their appreciation for what the shipyard is doing.

"If you did this in some other towns, and I won't name any, you might not get that reception," he said.