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Plans to expand Veterans Memorial Cemetery

Healey announces initiative during recent visit to town

By Brendan Rooney
Correspondent

AGAWAM — Last week, Gov. Maura Healey announced a major initiative at the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Agawam, pledging that her administration would pursue acquiring adjacent land to expand the cemetery and preserve burial opportunities for future generations of veterans.

"We need to start planning now before space becomes a challenge, so that we can understand what investments may be needed and ensure that future generations of Massachusetts veterans have access to the burial benefits and recognition that they've earned," Healey said. "Our veterans answered the call. We owe it to them, and their families, to make sure we're prepared to honor that service long into the future."

Echoing Healey's urgency was State Sen. John Velis (D–Westfield), a current member of the Army National Guard whose efforts earlier this spring helped secure a $700,000 bond authorization for the long-standing initiative.

Velis opened his thoughts by recalling that within five minutes of signing the historic HERO Act, Governor Healey turned to him and asked how Massachusetts could remain the best place in the country to be a veteran—a level of executive

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TURLEY PHOTOS BY BRENDAN ROONEY

Gov. Maura Healey with several local and state officials at a recent presentation at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery.



Officials and advocates cut the ribbon for the new Veterans Home.

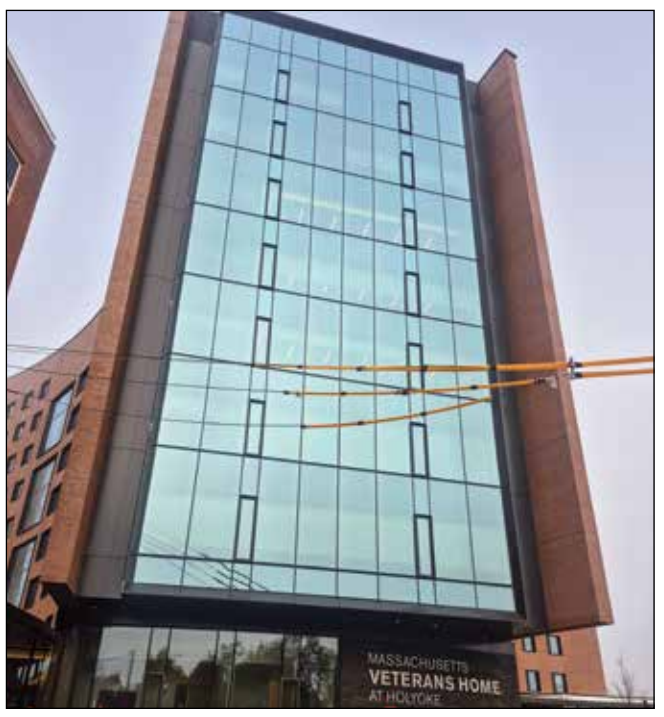
TURLEY PHOTOS BY BRENDAN ROONEY

New era for Veterans Home

By Brendan Rooney
Correspondent

HOLYOKE — Last Thursday, October 29, the new, state-of-the-art Massachusetts Veterans Home—a long-awaited sanctuary built to serve our nation's greatest heroes for generations to come—officially opened its doors.

Originally estimated as a $485 million project with a completion target of fall 2027 when first put out to bid in 2023, officials instead lauded the facility during Thursday's ribbon-cutting for coming in both ahead of schedule and under budget. The current project budget stands at $465 million, representing one of the largest public investments in Western Massachusetts history—backed by a $400 million state bond authorization approved by the Legislature alongside $263.5 million in matching funds from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program.



An exterior shot of the new Holyoke Veterans Home.

Additionally, overhauling state veterans' homes was established early on as a core mission of Governor Maura Healey's administration, fulfilling a promise to deliver the level of facility veterans deserve.

Echoing Healey's ode to commitment was Veterans Home Executive Director Michael Lazo.

"This project is more than improvements to our facility," Lazo shared during the ceremony. "It represents an investment in a state-of-the-art environment designed to meet the evolving needs of our veterans and reflects our ongoing commitment to providing exceptional care and the safe, welcoming, and supportive environment where veterans receive the dignity and respect they deserve."

The modern facility offers a comprehensive array of on-site services within an eight-story, 234-bed footprint. Powered by geothermal and solar energy and outfitted with occupancy sensors, the home balances

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Council supports policies to preserve Agawam mascot

By Quinn Suomala
Correspondent

AGAWAM – The city council supported a resolution asking Agawam Public Schools to remain in compliance with policies around school traditions and rituals.

The policy, AB-1, states that any changes made to the APS traditions and rituals must come before the school committee so the public can have their fair say in the matter.

Several members of the public came forward during citizen speak time to ensure that the council was aware of their support on this resolution.

They raised concerns that if this policy began to slip, the people of Agawam would lose their say in the schools' representation and traditions.

"By not adhering to the policy, decisions with deep cultural meaning could be made quickly, under pressure by individuals with no accountability to the Agawam community," Brian Bacis said.

"When changes to uniforms, logos, or branding are made without following policy AB-1, it bypasses the public and sidesteps the public officials chosen to oversee our schools," Dennis Dorochenko said.

City Council President Anthony Russo sponsored a resolution supporting a review of Policy AB-1 to ensure that administrators within APS remain in compliance with it.

During the school committee meeting on Sept. 15, School Committee Member AJ Christopher brought forward a concern about changes he had noticed in APS sports team uniforms.

He was worried that the mascot was not appearing on

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Bid farewell to old AHS



On Saturday, Nov. 14 and Saturday, Nov. 28, the Town of Agawam will host tours of Agawam High School as the town prepares to demolish the building for the next phase of the high school project. All residents and alumni are encouraged to attend one of the tour dates for one last look through the old school building. Tours will be held both dates from 12 to 4 p.m. and tours will start in the school cafeteria.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

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SPORTS

Boys soccer advances to WMass finals

AGAWAM – The Agawam High School boys soccer team won two games last week to advance to the Western Mass. Championship game, which was played earlier this week. Agawam would beat Longmeadow in overtime in the quarterfinals with Aidan Monagnhan, Leon Privendenyuk, and Nick Ghareeb scoring the goals. Then, last Thursday evening, Privendenyuk scored the lone goal as Agawam had a huge defensive effort in a win at Ludlow High School. With the wins, Agawam improved to 8-6-4. Regardless of their result in the finals, Agawam will make the state tournament. Agawam faced Northampton Monday night in the Western Mass. Class A Tournament. Following that, the Brownies will get going in the Division 2 State Tournament.









Clockwise from above: Jack Chivers goes for the header; Zac Cook goes for a free kick; Dylan Jorgensen tries to shoot ahead of pressure; Aidan Monaghan goes after a ball in the air; John Carra competes for possession; Nathan Bassette goes after the loose ball.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI



