SOMERVILLE— Wednesday, September 18, 2013— Governor Deval Patrick today joined Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone, executives from Federal Realty Investment Trust and state and local officials to celebrate the opening of Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park at Assembly Row in Somerville. The development of this urban park area will create a gathering place for current and future residents of the City and help strengthen the neighborhoods and various communities surrounding it.

“Baxter Riverfront Park shows that when we work together, state government, along with the private sector and the local community, we can leave lasting improvements for the future generations of the Commonwealth,” said Governor Patrick.

Since taking office, the Patrick Administration has made a historic investment of more than $300 million in land conservation. This has been accomplished by focusing on three goals: preserving working farms and forests, protecting large natural landscapes for habitat and investing in urban parks.
The $3.5 million, nearly-completed Baxter State Park includes space for community events, a sunken amphitheater, a children’s play area, a viewing deck and paths linking Assembly Row to the Somerville community.

The park is being constructed through a collaborative effort between the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and Federal Realty Investment Trust (FRT). Federal Realty acquired the site in 2005 and began working with the City of Somerville to develop the Assembly Row project, the largest mixed-use development under construction by a single owner in the Commonwealth. Once completed, it will include residential and commercial buildings, as well as a new MBTA Orange Line Station.

Part of the vision for the Assembly Row project was to reclaim the waterfront by opening it up to the community as a useable, walkable and natural gathering place that highlighted the beauty of the Mystic River. As part of mitigation, FRT swapped a large tract of privately-owned riverfront land with DCR for a smaller inland parcel that the state owned.

“Under Governor Patrick’s leadership, we have been able to provide access to thousands of acres of open space and parkland across the Commonwealth,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Rick Sullivan. “Having these spaces are especially important in densely populated communities like Somerville, and we are thrilled residents will have such a beautiful park to enjoy for generations to come.”

“DCR is charged with enhancing the recreational experience across Massachusetts,” said DCR Commissioner Jack Murray. “Baxter State Park provides visitors with one-of-a-kind views of the Mystic River, and will quickly become a prized community asset that will be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.”

Federal Realty has also committed to fund the construction of an underpass beneath the Fells Parkway along the river’s edge. When completed, the underpass will connect Baxter Park with The Shore Drive Parklands, Blessing of the Bay Boathouse in Ten Hills and further points north along the Mystic River, creating a continuous linear park system along the Mystic River to the Alewife MBTA Station in Cambridge.

“Baxter Park connects the rest of Somerville to Assembly Row, giving the residents of this new neighborhood, Somerville and surrounding areas a place to bike, walk, picnic, sing, create, play and enjoy,” said Don Briggs, President Federal Realty Boston. “From community events to family time and everything in between, Baxter Park was designed and built with this community in mind. Great environments lead to a better way of life and Baxter Park will be a signature piece of our new neighborhood, serving our residents, office workers, employees and visitors for generations to come.”

In addition to the investments made in Baxter State Park and Somerville, the Patrick Administration developed the Gateway City Parks Program to make strategic park investments as part of the Administration’s effort to improve the 26 eligible cities. Gateway Cities are communities with population greater than 35,000, and median household incomes and educational attainment levels below the state average. Over the past three years, the Patrick Administration has invested nearly $38.5 million to create or restore parks in Gateway Cities.

“This park is a very welcome addition of recreational, green space to the city,” said Senator Patricia Jehlen. “It is a great, open park with a beautiful view of the water that residents will appreciate for years to come.”

“I am pleased to see the official opening of Baxter State Park overlooking the Mystic
River," said Representative Carl Sciortino. “It will surely be a perfect spot for recreation and relaxation for residents and visitors to the City of Somerville, and I'm eagerly looking forward to continued development and completion of the Assembly Row project.”

“Assembly Square never looked so good, and I’m very proud of the successful public-private partnership that helped create this beautiful park,” said Representative Timothy Toomey, Jr. “I look forward to seeing even more kids and families enjoying the revitalized Mystic River waterfront.”

Close to a quarter of the Commonwealth’s residents, nearly 1.5 million people, are within a ten minute walk from the more than 110,000 acres conserved and 170 parks created under the Patrick Administration. A recent study by The Trust for Public Land found Massachusetts’ investments in parks and conservation are paying off. According to the study, the state’s Gateway Cities Parks Program is generating about $26.5 million in local wages and salaries and created nearly 500 jobs.

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