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BOSTON HARBOR BOUNTY

DELEGATES TO the Democratic National Convention who head for the airport by water taxi today might find themselves distracted by patrol boats shadowing anything that floats. But the sights on Boston Harbor and its beaches in July also include swimmers, recreational boaters, fishermen, and sunbathers.

The currents from the \$4.5 billion cleanup of Boston Harbor flow in elaborate patterns. It's a different harbor today from the filthy one used by the elder George Bush in 1988 to embarrass Michael Dukakis. The federal order to end the discharge of untreated sewage into Boston Harbor and Massachusetts Bay eventually transformed the city. That fact became clearer still with the recent Big Dig depression of the Central Artery and planning for a major greenway in the area once dominated by the elevated highway. Boston once again faces the sea.

Since the 1980s, harbor activists in Boston have concentrated mainly on issues of environmental stewardship, knowing that people won't preserve what they don't value. But a just-released study by the nonprofit environmental group Save the Harbor/Save the Bay argues that the infusion of public funds into both the cleanup of the harbor and the Big Dig has created major economic development opportunities that should transform the city over the next two decades.

Both residential and employment growth

along the city's waterfront easily outstrips Boston's overall growth rate, according to the report. Nearly 7,000 units of new housing are expected to be built over the next 15 years, key to easing the city's housing shortage. Private development could exceed \$8 billion if the hotel, office, retail, and residential projects either under construction or planned come to fruition. Tens of thousands of jobs could be created in an area once dominated by rotting piers and fish shacks.

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's president, Patricia Foley, stresses that profits and high real estate values are not synonymous with success on Boston Harbor. Battles have been fought and won to protect public access along the waterfront. A HarborWalk that will connect the city from East Boston to Dorchester is taking shape. Free harbor tours for Boston's low-income youths aren't likely to appear in any return-on-investment study, yet they connect the city to the coast in important ways.

The enormous public investment in the waterfront area was required to meet federal standards for clean air and water. Economic development is the great by-product. But such gains grow harder to reach. This week, attorneys general from six Northeastern states sued the federal Environmental Protection Agency, charging that rule changes governing water use by power plants degrade water quality and fishery resources. The lessons of Boston Harbor should not be allowed to ebb.