

Menino: Roche Bros. at Filene's is what Downtown Crossing needs

By Thomas Grillo



In a dramatic display that included rising steam and a hail of white confetti, Millennium Partners broke ground on Tuesday at the former Filene's site in Boston's Downtown Crossing, a \$630 million project that will include a 30,000-square-foot supermarket.

"The Filene's site is synonymous with Downtown Boston," said a smiling Mayor Thomas M. Menino before a crowd of more than 200 people who gathered for the ground breaking, five years after the original project stalled. "The start of construction celebrates the beginning of a new chapter in the history of this historic building and highlights the promising future that is in store for this neighborhood."

The 60-story Millennium Tower is underway and it will add 450 luxury residences and 95,000 square feet of retail space on its lower floors. Roche Bros. Supermarket will open the first large grocery store next year in the adjacent Burnham building, the original Filene's, that is set to be renovated.

“Roche Brothers will be making the first large scale grocery store to be built in Downtown Crossing,” said Menino. “I know there’s a big demand for a supermarket here because people keep asking with all this development there’s no grocery store. I’m delighted to say that Roche Brothers will serve the growing number of residents who call this neighborhood home.”

Christopher Jeffries, founding partner at Millennium Partners, told the story of how he met Menino for the first time when the mayor summoned the executive for a meeting about a tower project the developer proposed for above the Massachusetts Turnpike. He said the mayor didn’t like the idea, but suggested he may want to build a condo tower on lower Washington Street. Millennium would later build the Ritz-Carlton Boston Common.

A few years later as the Filene’s project stalled under Vornado Realty Trust, the mayor asked Jeffries to talk to Vornado about jump starting the project. Jeffries said he met with Vornado’s CEO Steven Roth.

“I told Steve: ‘The mayor was not happy with what you’re doing and it’s so easy to fix it because it’s a great site, you’re just doing the wrong thing, you can’t be building an office building and a hotel, what you need to do is build residences,’ he recalled. “He spent a little time thinking about it and then said: ‘I’d rather just sell you the site and since that’s your vision, you do it.’ ”

A source close to Vornado said they too could have got the project underway if the city had offered them the same deal given to Millennium —\$7.8 million in tax credits as well as the added height to the tower.

But Menino dismissed the suggestion. “All I can say is that’s wishful thinking, they never came up with a proposal that made any sense,” Menino said.