

'How sweet it is': Officials break ground on convention center hotel

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City and hotel officials at the groundbreaking of the convention center hotel.
Photo by Hannah Leyva.

Several dozen people braved cold temperatures and freezing rain Friday morning to attend the groundbreaking of the long-anticipated hotel adjacent to the Wilmington Convention Center.

After years of delays, including a legal battle regarding the sale of the land where the hotel will be built, construction will finally begin on the 162,866 square-foot Embassy Suites Hotel.

“How sweet it is!” Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo said to start off his speech. “We are finally here.”

The 186-suite, \$33.6 million hotel will be developed by Virginia-based Harmony Hospitality on the 33,000 square-foot undeveloped plot of land between the convention center and the Riverwalk. It will have eight floors as well as a newly announced 4,000 square-foot rooftop bar. Originally expected to be completed this year, it is now targeting a spring 2017 opening.

“This has been a long hard road to get here,” Saffo said, referencing not only the development of the hotel but also that of the convention center itself, which was completed at the beginning of the decade. “I want to say to the previous councils that have worked hard to make this happen, that have been consistent in the message ... thank you all for being a part of this.”

The Embassy Suites is the first of three hotels planned for the area, which lacks accommodations for people coming from out of town to make use of the meeting facilities. Plans for a Hotel Indigo next to the Port City Marina are in the works, and developers recently got franchise approval to operate an Aloft Hotel adjacent to the Coastline Conference and Event Center a block from the convention center. They will join the 53-room Best Western Plus Coastline Inn, located next to the Coastline Conference Center, and the Hilton Wilmington Riverside a few blocks south, which are currently the only hotels within walking distance of the convention center.