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back 

## Convention center authority digging in

Officials reiterate commitment amid archaeological study

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ALBANY -- As the Albany Convention Center Authority awaits word on the project's fate, it is beginning to dig into the city's past.

An archaeological dig begun late last week is already unveiling bits of broken pottery that give a glimpse into the earliest days of the Dutch settlement of the region. Authority officials gathered Monday to discuss the start of the excavations.

Gov. David Paterson has yet to decide whether to give the go-ahead for the nearly \$400 million project, which needs an additional \$190 million in state aid. He is awaiting a review of the project's viability by auditing firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, due later this month.

"It's an important part of where we're going," said Mayor Jerry Jennings of the convention center. "We're not going to back down from the need for the convention center."

Convention authority leaders said the excavations will be beneficial to whoever develops the land, even if the center is not built. The convention authority still has access to \$73 million in the initial state aid, which can pay for the next two steps -- acquiring the land and designing the center and connected 400-room hotel -- but those require the governor's approval.

The added \$190 million is not needed this year, said Assemblyman Jack McEneny, D-Albany, a member of the authority board, but the state's commitment is required to continue pursuing the project.

The dig began in Liberty Park at the corner of Hudson Avenue and Dallius Street downtown, chosen because the site has been free of structures since homes on the site were demolished in 1808.

"It's really rare in Albany to have an undisturbed site," said Corey McQuinn, project director.

"This gives archaeologists a chance to look back through the past," said Matt Kirk, project manager. "We can see this potential is already starting to be realized. We are already getting back to the 18th century, and we hope to get back to the 17th century."

The dig began Thursday so that some material would be found by Monday's kickoff.

McEneny, who authored a book on the city's history, said the land where the convention center is planned once stood between two stockades.

"This place was an armed camp," he said. "The British were at war with the French repeatedly."

The authority has gained permission from about 45 percent of the landowners on the proposed convention center site to allow the digs. It is still negotiating with others.

"By carefully examining these soils, we'll be able to use these as keystones as we dig further to the south," Kirk said.

Any artifacts found will be washed, sorted and anthologized before likely ending up in a museum's collection, McQuinn said.

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