



TOWN of  
**THOMPSON**

MILL SITES REDEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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**MILL SITES REDEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING**

Thompson Public Library/Community Center – Room 2

Thursday, June 1, 2017  
6:30 PM

***The Potential Future of 929 Riverside Drive (aka The River Mill)***  
**UPDATE**

**MINUTES**

PRESENT: J. Blanchette, Chairman  
S. Lewis  
B. H. Davis  
J. Hall

ABSENT: N. O'Leary  
R. Faucher

ALSO PRESENT: S. Donohoe, Owner Liaison, K. Beausoleil, First Selectman, M. A. Chinatti, Director of Planning & Development, T. Levine, CT SHPO, Brad Shide, CTHP, Members of the Public (sign-in sheet attached to these minutes)

1. CALL TO ORDER – Chairman Blanchette called the meeting to order at 6:38PM.

2. PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING:

a. J. Blanchette, Chairman, MSRAC - Introduction/Statement of Meeting Purpose

Chairman Blanchette introduced the meeting. She stated the Committee held a public informational meeting in January to talk about the status of the mill, and in March, there was a document filed in the land records, an Easement, Bill of Sale and Memorandum of Agreement, where the owner entered into an agreement with a third party which gave the third party access to the property for five (5) years for the purpose of deconstructing improvements, extracting, removal and storage. She stated the easements basically allow the third party to take the mill down to the ground, which could result in total destruction of the mill. She continued, stating that after the documents were filed M. A. Chinatti and K. Beausoleil contacted the State Historic Preservation Office (hereinafter referred

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to as SHPO) and the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation (hereinafter referred to as CTHP) to enlist their support and CTHP wrote a letter in opposition to the demolition to the SHPO. She stated there have been meetings between SHPO and the owner and the third party, and that there was a tour of the mill site property and the Town invited some of the other potential developers to attend that tour. She then introduced the slate of speakers, stating S. Donohoe, the owner's liaison, will speak on the current status of the mill, K. Beausoleil will speak, as will T. Levine from SHPO, who will explain to the community the process that is going on at the State level to how to potentially get an injunction or to stop the demolition.

Before turning the floor over to S. Donohoe, Chairman Blanchette asked the audience that, should they wish to speak/comment, to please come up to the podium and use the microphone so everyone would be able to hear the questions/comments.

b. S. Donohoe, Owner's Liaison – Property Status Update

S. Donohoe, representing the property owner, stated nothing has really changed since the last meeting, and that the owner is currently going through the hurdles/obstacles being placed before the owner with regard to the different hurdles that have to be assessed to accomplish and move forward with the third party's request. He stated the owner has been dealing with attorneys and the State and that there will be a hearing, he believes, sometime in August. He stated the owner is just continuing to address the issues as they arise and seek legal and professional advice on what are the different options that are available. He stated the tour was conducted, noting the developers might not have seen everything they wanted to see as there were about 22 people in attendance. He stated he was not sure if there will be additional tours for people to get a clearer picture of "the good, the bad and the ugly." He continued, stating the status quo is being maintained moving forward they will answer questions from the State. He stated the owner had to change law firms due to a conflict of interest with the Town.

In response to a question from audience member Susan Esons, who asked if the owner still wants to demolish the building, S. Donohoe stated that the owner is dealing with the third party that wants to take the building down. He stated he's been there for 30 years, as well as his father/family, and a couple of different owners have been gone through, and all possible options have been exhausted in his opinion. He stated those in attendance will hear it's the best building ever; however, it's in the wrong location and, square footage-wise, there's no demand, and tenants don't want to use elevators for manufacturing or for warehousing.

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He stated it's a tough situation, and he's shown the building to 30 different prospects for everything from rehabbing, buying, tearing down over the years

and, prior to that, Mr. Scott purchased the property from him (Donohoe) so he (Donohoe) actually interviewed other people before Mr. Scott bought it. He continued, stating it's a tough situation, the building is 750,000 square feet, it's a big building with a lot of square footage without the demand in the local area for it. He stated the mill has never been leased over 59% besides the original, Arrow Shirts, as they had the whole building. He stated that, following Arrow Shirts, there have been multiple tenants of all sizes over the years and they are fewer and fewer and farther in between now. He stated tenants are moving out, finding buildings in the Putnam Industrial Park and Plainfield and Killingly for lower rents, multiple loading docks, etc., which can't be supplied at the mill. He stated the owner is entertaining a third party, and that third party is the company that will be looking to dismantle it.

Chairman Blanchette then asked that all questions/comments be held until the appropriate time on the agenda. She introduced K. Beausoleil, First Selectman.

c. K. Beausoleil, First Selectman – Potential Developer Outreach

K. Beausoleil thanked everyone for attending, noting that the issue is a very important one and the mill is a very integral piece of the Town's history. He stated he's been around town all his life and he understands what S. Donohoe was talking about. He noted that we are just coming out of the economic downturn, and back in 2010 there was a plan to put housing in that did not come to fruition. He reiterated some information provided at the January meeting, noting the grant work that was initiated on the property which was funded by DECD with the goal of revitalizing the mill and keeping the historic building up and going, adding that the property is located within one of the Town's Enterprise Corridor Zones. He stated, following the filing Chairman Blanchette talked about, the Town reached out to DECD, CTHP and SHPO to explain the situation, adding that the building is on the National Register, and that there is a process that anything proposed to be demolished have authorization to do so. He stated the mill is a vital link, and that what is just down the road at the Belding site we are very leery as a Town that this property will develop into the same situation, the Town does not need that, and that the mill is in the heart of the Town. He stated the Town understands what the owner is going through, that it is a financial situation for him, but that the Town has to look at what is in its best interest. He then discussed the Economic Development Commission's Branding project, noting that part of the project does include the mill. He then talked about the May 9 tour of the building and potential developers interested in redeveloping

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the mill. He stated one of the things potential developers did say is that because of the size of the mill there's an opportunity for multiple developers to work on different projects to redevelop it. He stated the climate is right so this can be

accomplished. He noted that the mill has just leased +/- 20,000 square feet for warehousing/storage, and there is also another company looking at 30,000 square feet. He stated the Town will do what it can to work with DECD and the developers and convince the owner redevelopment is the proper way to go.

d. Todd Levine, CT DECD State Historic Preservation Office – CEPA Intervention Request

T. Levine, Architectural Historian for the State Historic Preservation Office, stated the mill is on the National Register, and that it is one of the most significant mills in the state and in New England. He continued, stating the State supports all efforts to develop and revitalize the site. He stated SHPO met with the Town and with the property owner/its representative. He stated, re the tour of the mill, that there was not enough time at that tour to see all areas of the mill, and there may still be some issues/conditions that may be an obstacle to redevelopment; he noted that the five developers in attendance, who were from around the country, were confident that if they decided to redevelop the mill they could successfully redevelop the site. He noted that there were a couple of developers from down south in attendance at that tour who have redeveloped mills the size of, or larger than, 929 Riverside Drive. He stated there is still the process of making an agreement with Mike Harmon, Southend Reclaimed, who currently has development rights. He stated the deal has to work for all parties, and the CT Environmental Protection Act states a National Register building can't be demolished/destroyed if there are feasible and prudent alternatives, where there appears to be with this building. He then explained the CEPA intervention process, noting that M. Harmon was requested to attend a Historic Preservation Council meeting scheduled for June 7, but noted the meeting would not go forward until August as M. Harmon indicated he must seek alternate counsel due to a conflict of interest as his attorney and one of the Town's attorneys are from the same firm. The meeting has tentatively been rescheduled to Wednesday, August 2, for Southend Reclaimed to argue their position on why it is not unreasonable to destroy the mill. He stated the law may allow an injunction to be put into place to stop the demolition so that an agreement could be made to save it, noting the whole point of the law is to "find a way out of destruction." He then reiterated his opinion that there are feasible and prudent alternatives to destruction,, though none have yet been presented (i.e. proposals, etc.). He stated that M. Harmon and one of the

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developers have been working behind the scenes on a proposal to redevelop the property. He then stated anyone can bring suit to hold the demolition, which would then go in front of a judge and the party bringing suit would be required to show there is a feasible and prudent alternative to destructions. He stated there are court cases where selling the site is the alternative. He stated there is a risk, however, as the plaintiff, if no feasible/prudent alternative is shown, would be responsible for paying costs of the party wishing to demolish the building. He stated this is why the process re this mill is going through the CTHP. He stated SHPO is going through the fact-finding process in preparation for the August Historic Preservation Council meeting. He noted that, at that meeting, the CTHP, on behalf of the Town, will have 20 minutes to make its presentation, then the owner would have 20 minutes to explain why it is not feasible to do what CTHP suggests, and then the floor would be opened up to anyone interested, giving them an opportunity to speak for five (5) minutes. He stated the Council would then discuss, in open forum, and make a determination as to whether there are, indeed, feasible and prudent alternatives. If yes, the Council will ask the Attorney General to investigate, which he will do and if he finds enough evidence that there is a feasible and prudent alternative to demolition, he will file an injunction. He stated the goal is to have a temporary injunction so all parties can work to find a proposal that will redevelop and not destroy one of the most iconic mills in the state. He then talked about a similar case SHPO was involved with in Norwich, stating that case ended up with an agreement to redevelop, and that details are now being worked out. He stated this mill is something the State believes can be saved, and loss of that building would be irreplaceable. He stated there are a number of financial tools available from the State, as well as tax credits, and the State will work with the developers. He stated it is possible to redevelop in phases, with tax credits available for each of the buildings, and between the State and Federal credits that could total 45% of the redevelopment costs. He stated the site is also a brownfield, and EPA has funds available. He stated the State will do everything it can to shepherd that process.

Chairman Blanchette thanked T. Levine for the presentation, and opened the floor to audience questions/comments.

## e. Public Comments/Questions

V. Iamartino stated she grew up in North Grosvenordale, first in Greek Village, then behind the mill, then on Main St. She stated she can't even imagine that building torn down, noting she is 4<sup>th</sup> generation and her ancestors moved to North Grosvenordale in the 1850s to work in the mill.

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She stated when you buy something like the mill you become a steward of that history. She stated Northeastern Connecticut has a uniqueness about it. She stated the building is in total neglect, and asked S. Donohoe if A. Scott, owner of the mill, is also the owner of the Belding site, to which S. Donohoe responded yes, but qualified that with A. Scott did not demolish the Belding Site. She then asked S. Donohoe if, when his family owned the mill, they applied for/received grants for preservation and, at what point does the preservation dollars transfer. She stated her believe that S. Donohoe hasn't really actively pursued redevelopment. She continued, stating that there is limited housing for low income and for the elderly, and that would be a good use for the mill. She stated it would be deplorable to have "book ends" at either end of town (speaking re demolition), noting this town has so much to offer. She reiterated her belief that if one takes on ownership of a building such as the mill, one takes on stewardship of that building, noting that it's easy to do something negative then walk away but that it gets difficult when you do something positive. She then talked about the 1020 Riverside Drive (aka Thomas Mill) transformation, and stated this area has something unique and one can raise a family here. She stated she would do whatever is needed to see the mil redeveloped.

S. Moskowicz asked if it were an "all or none" proposition, and if there are some parts of the building that are more valuable for reclamation and some more valuable for renovation and, if so, whether it makes economic sense to do it. He stated he is 100% in favor of renovation and not demolition.

S. Donohoe stated there is a destination for everything – the wood, the brick – everything has a home. He stated there are some portions of the building that more attractive than others.

K. Beausoleil stated M. Harmon informed him that he (Harmon) wants to demolish is the original 1867 part with the towers.

T. Levine stated that, if a developer came and wanted to demolish a portion of the building as part of a redevelopment plan the State would work with them and that the State is not saying one can't knock down any of it. He stated the State would work through a process to come to an end point where the building is brought back into service.

V. Iamartino asked what the dollar value A. Scott is looking for for the property, to which S. Donohoe stated that is up to A. Scott.

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S. Smith stated, as a resident, she and her family lease 50,000 sq. ft. in the mill, and that hers is a very unique situation - one being an elected official and the other being a business owner. She stated the building has served as an incubator-type of facility so businesses could see if their business would be a good fit and, if so, would extend their contract, or if they would be better served to move on to another facility. She stated her business has moved, within the mill, two (2) or three (3) times, noting it is now at tower 3 and it's been a very good fit though not perfect, stating that nothing is perfect. She stated that, because of the mill, she has been able to have a very successful business in town. She stated she's seen other parts of the building and it definitely has its challenges, but it's a sound home for her business. She stated, for those unaware, the Board of Selectmen did sign a policy making it clear that for this specific site the Board does not wish to see it demolished as the 3<sup>rd</sup> party is entertaining. She stated it is unfortunate (desire to demolish) noting that one of the photographs being shown (slideshow running throughout the meeting) is a beautiful space. She continued, speaking from her experience as a news reporter, stating that she does not want to see the mill get to the condition where it has to be torn down. She stated we need to make sure we aren't taking down a piece of history, and this is a type of building we can continue to pass down.

B. Schide, CTHP, stated that, as T. Levine mentioned, the Trust is in partnership with the Town for this issue. He stated he can't add anything to what V. Iamartino stated, and noted that many in attendance have the same spirit she has. He stated he also went on the tour and he has walked through many mill buildings, but this is in amazing shape. He stated there are some tough areas and things that can be overcome. He stated, re the environmental issue, the Town work is on hold now but many developers will know what they need to do. He stated the State's priority is to save mills and there is money available. He noted the Town has received a large grant to figure out the environmental issues. He stated that the owner lacks for imagination and sophistication and that a white knight isn't going to happen. He stated first the demolition must be stopped, noting that the Attorney General doesn't take on every project. He stated it (demolition) can be stopped if the community is in an uproar. He stated, to those in attendance, that they must be sure their name is on a petition, or that they have submitted a letter, and the Historic Preservation Council (HPC) will decide to save the building. He stated what happens at that meeting is a vote for the Town to involve the Attorney General. He stated they (HPC) needs to see mobilization/an involved community, and that the feasible and prudent alternatives need to focus on one development – not a full proposal but something to show the Attorney General what's going on here. He stated, if

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one feels this strongly about the building, one needs to support, with letters and petitions, the redevelopment efforts. He stated that will help, at the August hearing, save the building.

Chairman Blanchette stated that petition was available at the January meeting, and anyone wishing to add their name should contact M. A. Chinatti.

K. Beausoleil stated that his office could supply a copy if anyone wishes to distribute it.

Chairman Blanchette stated she reached out to, and hopes to have a letter of support from, the Last Green Valley.

S. Esons stated the building must be saved if at all possible. She stated the Town is definitely in need of new revenue and it's very possible the mill's renovation will bring in that new revenue. She stated one former tenant left the building to go to Putnam because "promises weren't kept." She continued, talking about a mill in Massachusetts that was repurposed, which revitalized the Town, and she would love to see that for this town. She stated she can't imagine the building is not in a good location, noting the proximity to 395 and three states. She stated redevelopment is possible and it needs to come to fruition.

T. Levine stated his believe that Worcester was one of the target areas for the developers bringing business in for 929 Riverside Drive.

H. Comen asked if the site had hydro/electric going in there, to which S. Donohoe stated it can't e used any more as the equipment is obsolete.

C. Langlois asked if someone owes taxes in the Town how do they get to sell the property, to which K. Beausoleil stated the Town has a tax lien on the building and it (the Town) is first priority.

R. Morin, Thompson Tax Collector, stated that, in round numbers, there is approximately \$200,000 owed in back taxes – real estate and sewer. He stated no conveyance can take place unless that is satisfied in full, noting there is a lien and the Town is well protected and the property can't transfer unless that liability is liquidated. He noted the property owner is the largest delinquent tax payer in Town.

C. Langlois continued, stating that if there are three (3) people interested in developing, and one of them is also interested in tearing it down, one

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probably wouldn't select that developer. She stated she doesn't want to see the mill torn down and, if one puts things together it can get done (redevelopment). She stated she pictured something like a 55-and-older development. She stated the Town should do something with it, but she is not sure if interested parties can "pitch in and help". She stated that August seems a long way off with windows falling in, and she wants to save the mill. She stated if all pull together, noting that just those in attendance at this meeting aren't going to save the mill, all need to go out and tell people so this room is over-full for the next meeting.

T. Levine stated August isn't really a long time, and there is an agreement in place with M. Harmon that he won't do anything (re demo initiation), and that was a condition for the SHPO to postpone the meeting.

V. Iamartino asked if there would be another public informational meeting before the August meeting and, if so, if the dollar amount A. Scott has in mind can be available before that meeting, to which K. Beausoleil stated the Town can hold another meeting between now and August if more information comes out and that, if another meeting is scheduled, T. Levine and B. Schide could attend that meeting. He stated we need to make things happen as a group to get that done, and S. Donohoe could talk with A. Scott to get a number.

Discussion ensued re digital availability of the petition/signing. T. Levine also suggested creating a facebook page.

In response to a question by C. Langlois re whether the public would be notified should a subsequent meeting be scheduled, K. Beausoleil stated we would try to coordinate and schedule the meeting.

Chairman Blanchette stated it may be possible that we could reach out to some of the interested developers to get their proposals.

W. Holder asked why, as the Town is trying to market/get businesses here, the property owner isn't trying to market the property more, to which S. Donohoe stated that historically the tower had no windows, and plexi-glass was placed in the towers in the '80s, which is not historically correct. He stated they have been trying for 30 years to market the property without success.

C. Sloate stated that the presence of T. Levine and B. Schide at this meeting is an indication of how important this is, and that we have the imagination to

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see there's a lot of potential there. She stated she left the last meeting thinking she could grow old in town, and that the energy from the last meeting is still strong. She stated she thinks this is a great location and mixed use would be very exciting and positive for the landscape, and that the Town doesn't want to see the property demolished.

Chairman Blanchette thanked everyone for coming. She stated most sitting at the conference tables are members of the Mill Sites Redevelopment Advisory Committee, and she thanked T. Levine, SHPO, and B. Schide, CTHP, and the residents. She stated public meetings would continue to be scheduled and encouraged all to attend the August HPC meeting.

3. ADJOURNMENT – With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:49PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Ann Chinatti  
Director of Planning & Development

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SPECIAL MEETING - JUNE 1, 2017

SIGN IN SHEET (VOLUNTARY)

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## SIGN IN SHEET (VOLUNTARY)

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