

# Mill Site Study Committee

Meeting minutes - April 22, 2009

**Present:** **Committee Members:** Kurt Amidon, Stephanie Cronin, Albert Harris, Ken Morgan, Ronald Karr, Georgette Rogers, Jeff Sauer, Joseph Sergi, and Stephen Themelis  
**Members absent:** Jerrilyn Bozicas, Roger Goscombe, Michael Landino, and Matt Nesbit  
**Also present:** Richard Stoltz of Bartram & Cochran

Mr. Sergi called the meeting to order at 7:07pm. Mr. Amidon joined the meeting at 7:20.

Mr. Sergi Introduced newly appointed Committee member, Ken Morgan.

**Approval of Minutes tabled:** Since the current meeting was not properly posted, Mr. Sergi advised that the Committee would be unable to officially vote on any matters, including the approval of minutes.

**Site testing:** Mr. Sergi reported that Mill Site owner, PerryVidex, has begun environmental testing on the Mill Site. Mr. Sergi noted that the type of testing currently underway is not to the level that he would have preferred in order to gain a full understanding of the site and any potential environmental issues, but it is a start.

Mr. Sergi reported that the Selectmen are in the process of receiving and reviewing applications for a Master Plan. Application submissions by interested firms are due by April 28.

**Meeting with Bartram & Cochran:** Mr Stoltz, who first met with the Committee on March 11, stated that Bartram & Cochran Market Analysis is well underway. He noted three documents for the Committee to review (all available on the website): an initial draft of the first portion of the Market Analysis, including analyses of Pepperell's demographics, business climate, and housing; a Site Analysis performed by Wright-Pierce; and "Preliminary Conclusions on Reuse of the Pepperell Mill Site," which included the names of numerous interviewees with whom Bartram & Cochran have met, notes on feedback received, and several initial discoveries and conclusions. Mr. Stoltz led a discussion of the preliminary insights and conclusions, encouraging the committee to imagine a completely green space to work with and what might be possible in such an appealing location along the river and near the dam and covered bridge.

- Bartram & Cochran's initial recommendation for the site is a mixed-use, lifestyle development that would include a combination complimentary niche or boutique retail establishments – a bakery/coffee/tea shop, jewelry store, gift or antique store, a restaurant or brew pub, specialty grocer, health club, mens/womens/outdoor clothing store, etc. – that together would create a destination location. Stoltz envisioned a covered bridge or mill museum, outdoor benches, antique lighting, and walking paths.
- Most site buildings are not viable, although Mr. Stoltz suggested three brick buildings (1, 2, and 4) could be renovated to create a history feel. Stoltz also envisioned saving the tall smoke stack as an iconic landmark.
- Mr. Stolz suggested that there are likely to be environmental issues with the site. Based on previous environmental studies, he noted that industrial re-development would probably not require significant environmental clean-up, but that industrial is not what Bartram & Cochran is recommending. Further testing would be necessary before proceeding with residential or commercial development. Mr. Harris offered insight into how the different buildings were used and where problem areas might be found.
- Developers with whom Mr. Stoltz has spoken are likely to be interested in this type of project, although most are looking a few years down the road.
- Mr. Stoltz summarized the demographics of Pepperell, many of which are favorable. Pepperell's citizenry is

younger than the county average. Vacancy rates are lower and housing is more affordable. Education level is lower than the county average, as is the percentage of white collar workers. Construction is well represented. Purchasing power (family income compared to housing costs) exceeds the county average by a healthy margin. Mr. Stoltz noted that the current economy has eroded values, but that the average number of days on the market for housing has begun to decrease. Retail, restaurants, and hotels are less represented. Nashua is the main competition for spending dollars and there is spending “leakage” in all categories. Ms. Rogers noted that Middlesex county is exceedingly diverse and that it is difficult to compare Pepperell and Ashby to cities like Everett and Cambridge.

- Ms. Cronin asked if we were looking to draw people to the community. Mr. Stoltz said that would be the recommendation. Ms. Rogers asked whether we would need an anchor store with a large draw. Mr. Sauer noted that smaller stores often come and go and that a couple of store failures in a small retail complex could quickly spell trouble overall. Mr. Stoltz agreed, noting that a successful restaurant or brew pub could be critical for overall success.
- Mr. Karr expressed surprise that a larger grocer would not be considered viable, referencing previous interest from both Shaws and Hannafords in building stores along Rte 119 in Groton, including the Hannaford proposal for what is now Mill Plaza, just over the Pepperell line. Mr. Karr did concede that Rte. 119 through Pepperell isn't zoned for commercial.
- Ms. Cronin questioned the retail, asking about light industrial and renewing the suggestion of an assisted living complex similar to the successful Rivercourt Residences in the former West Groton. Mr. Stoltz noted that neither would offer vibrancy to the entire area; industrial not drawing as many people to the site daily was a commercial/medical office component and the demographics of assisted living residents not generating the spending. Mr. Stoltz also stated that, based on his research, the assisted living market has been flooded in the general area. Ms. Cronin asked about the burgeoning biotech industrial in Massachusetts. Mr. Stoltz suggested that the type of facilities needed by biotech – expense lab space – would be difficult for the site.
- Mr. Stoltz suggested that the appeal of the mill site would be as a traditional New England site. Mr. Karr suggested that this is no ordinary mill site because so few the traditional buildings would remain. Mr. Stoltz agreed, although countered that the proximity to the river and downtown location make it more similar than not.
- Mr. Stoltz noted that some amount residential would likely be a must for any developer, although he was not ready to offer any type of percentage. Nonetheless, residential offers the easiest and quickest return for a developer and that would likely be critical.
- Mr. Sergi asked how the current zoning on the site was for development. Mr. Stoltz said it was good and wouldn't likely present a problem.
- Mr. Morgan suggested the Conservation Commission would have issues with re-development. Mr. Sauer noted that the Conservation Commission is anxious to have such a sensitive riverfront site improved and that there are a lot of ways a new development could do improve the protection of the waterway while still creating a viable project.
- Mr. Sergi discussed Town's potentially active role in gaining grant funding for development.

**Next Meeting:** TBA

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Sauer, Mill Site Study Committee Secretary