

# Mill Site Study Committee

Meeting minutes - March 11, 2009

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

Mr. Sergi called the meeting to order at 7:03pm.

**Approval of Minutes from February 11, 2009:** On a motion from Mr. Goscombe, seconded by Ms. Rogers, the minutes from the February 11 meeting was approved unanimously as drafted.

**Site testing:** Mr. Sergi reported that Mill Site owner, PerryVidex, is exploring undertaking further environmental testing in order to determine present soil conditions at the Mill Site and whether any hazards would hamper future development, including possible residential use.

**Meeting with Bartram & Cochran:** Mr Stoltz introduced Bartram & Cochran as a real estate and economic development consultancy that has performed market analyses on sites across the country, some of which are quite similar to the Pepperell Mill site. He noted that the work on the Pepperell Mill Site market analysis began in February and already includes demographic information and an inventory of local businesses. Bartram & Cochran is now in the process of interviewing both business owners and town and regional officials to garner more detailed insight into the local business climate, opportunities, regulations, and obstacles. A financial analysis will also be performed. Mr. Stoltz noted that the market analysis is a four-month process which, having begun in February, is on schedule to be completed in the late spring.

Mr. Stoltz then opened the floor to the Mill Site Committee, asking members to speak about what they ultimately envision for the Mill Site and what opportunities they feel exist there.

- Several members said they would like to see a riverside restaurant or microbrewery
- Retail was discussed, although the committee acknowledged that demographics and proximity to Nashua's broader shopping options would pose an obstacle for many types of retail. It was acknowledged that there was little chance, or desire, for a large scale retail anchor at the Mill Site. Mr. Landino cited the Vermont Country Store as the type of a destination retail location store that could draw people to Pepperell.
- Ms. Cronin offered a vision of an assisted living complex similar to the successful Rivercourt Residences in the former West Groton mill where there is now a combination of assisted living, senior citizen apartments, senior day care, and a child day care.
- There was a discussion of other types of residential, perhaps as a necessary elemental to Mill Site development. Mr. Sergi noted two other 40B projects currently under construction or in planning.
- Mr. Themelis suggested the site might suit commercial office space for legal, medical, or other professionals that didn't require traditional street frontage
- Mr. McNabb suggested that some businesses currently in Lomar Park – such as gymnastics, karate, fitness, houses of worship – could be better served by a downtown light industrial type of facility.
- Mr. Goscombe noted the success of the Groton-based Nashua River Watershed Association on Rte. 119

and the educational facility there that boasts an annual attendance to environmental and ecological classes of some 11,000 citizens. He suggested that perhaps a similar ecotourism-oriented educational facility, or even a sporting goods store with a similar outdoors theme, could be successful at the Mill Site.

- Several members noted the high traffic of the rail trail/bike path and discussed options for bringing rail trail users into the Mill Site by way of sidewalks, bridges, or a new rail trail branch
- Mr. Karr believed that the covered bridge, once rebuilt, would be the oldest public way, covered bridge location in Massachusetts still open to vehicle traffic and thus a potential tourist draw. Mr. Sauer noted the town-owned conversation land at the north end of the Mill Site and the hill there which overlooks the covered cover bridge and the Mill Site.
- Several members hoped for open space or recreation opportunities at the Mill Site, perhaps tying into the conservation land, rail trail, Nashua River, or covered bridge
- Mr. Goscombe sited the renaissance of open mic or jazz-oriented music clubs and proposed that the Mill Site could house an off-the-beaten-path club in a restaurant or inn
- There was discussion of lodging and the possible opportunities for a small inn or hotel, perhaps with conference facilities. Several members sited specific instances when such a facility would have been a resource for townspeople or local businesses. Mr. Karr noted that Pepperell is renown in skydiving circles.
- Ms. Cronin expressed a desire to have some of the history of the Mill Site either retained or revived in the design of future buildings. It was suggested that architectural elements would be determined in the future, but Mr. Sauer argued that leveraging the Mill Site history, and further the history of Pepperell as a two-rail rail line, two-river industrial hub was indeed an opportunity
- Mr. Goscombe and Mr. Sauer discussed the incongruous nature of the Mill site as a highly prominent downtown location, but one with very little frontage and poor, in not dangerous Main St., accessibility. Several types of retail businesses couldn't survive without the Main St. visibility. Retail success at the Mill Site will demand a creative solution to the traffic patterns, traditional ideas of frontage and/or developing a destination location.
- Mr. Goscombe observed that for any restaurant, club, brew pub, or any other noteworthy food service business to be successful, the Town would need to grant a liquor license
- Parking, traffic access from Main St. and/or Mill St., and the Main/Mill intersection are big questions facing any development of the site
- Mr. Karr noted that much of the Mill Site is in the flood plain
- Mr. Stoltz inquired about the Swift River Hydro electric plant and confirmed that it is operational

**Next Meeting:** TBA

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Sauer, Mill Site Study Committee Secretary