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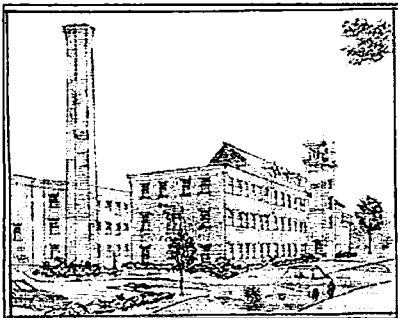
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Vacant N. Berwick mill to get new life as housing

By NOEL K. GALLAGHER, Staff Writer
Portland Press Herald Maine Sunday Telegram

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Reader Comments (below)

Thursday, November 30, 2006



Architect's rendering by
The mill project moved ahead when voters approved a special tax financing treatment Tuesday night.

NORTH BERWICK - The town's old woolen mill will be redeveloped into about 40 units of low-income senior housing.

The plan was approved Tuesday night, when voters at a special town meeting endorsed special tax treatment for the project.

"We're quite excited," said Town Manager Dwayne Moran. "We want to see that building renovated and used. It has a long and storied history and this is a great re-use of the building."

Moran said the three-story brick mill, a historic landmark, dates back to the 1800s and produced wool blankets for soldiers in the Civil War. After the mill shut down, a handful of commercial offices located there, but it has been vacant for about five years. It was featured in the 1995 movie "Jumanji" as the setting of a shoe factory. The mill, located on the Great Works River, has a distinctive clock tower and faces the town commons.

"We were struck by how handsome the buildings are in North Berwick," said Rob Bernardin, director of acquisitions at the Caleb Foundation. "It struck us as wonderful potential senior housing because of the location to downtown."

The Massachusetts-based foundation has agreed to purchase the mill from its owner, Great Canal LLC, for \$900,000, Moran said. The foundation will invest another \$6.5 million in renovations to the buildings and grounds, Bernardin said.

The nonprofit affordable housing developer already manages 450 units in Maine at several locations, including the 297-unit River Valley Village in Lewiston.

Tenants at the North Berwick site, which will consist of one- and two-bedroom units, must be seniors whose annual income is no more than 60 percent of the area's median income of \$60,800, or about \$36,500.

"There is significant need for this kind of housing," said Dan Simpson, spokesman for the Maine State Housing Authority. In York County, about 2,360 households of seniors earn less than 50 percent of the region's median income, but there are only about 1,700 subsidized units for them. Compounding the affordable housing shortfall are increasing rent and home prices, Simpson said.

As part of the North Berwick deal, the town approved a special tax increment financing district to help attract state and federal funds. Under the TIF agreement, the town will return 50 percent of the taxes paid on the project to the Caleb Foundation, with approximately \$17,500 in annual taxes going to the town. Since TIF assets are sheltered from the town's state valuation, town officials anticipate an additional \$15,000 a year in savings.

The foundation plans to start construction this summer and open by summer 2008.

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Reader comments

Shawn of North Berwick, ME

Nov 30, 2006 7:56 AM

I am proud to be a citizen of North Berwick. This, folks, is how to be good to your fellow man. Especially the seniors, since they have put in a lifetime of work and deserve it. Merry Christmas to all!

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