

JOURNAL TRIBUNE

NEWS

Renovation of Sanford mill begins

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Clean-up of Mill Number One will clear the way for redevelopment

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Published:
Tuesday, August 4, 2009 12:05 PM EDT

SANFORD — The backhoe was ready, poised to start moving in just as ceremonies to mark the start of clean-up of the old Sanford Mill Number One concluded.

The ceremony Monday, at the front entrance of the mill at 61 Washington Street, is the first tangible evidence that the town's long-sought quest to revitalize the millyard is beginning. Commencement of clean-up comes just days after the Maine Historic Preservation Commission voted to nominate Sanford's 7.5 acre millyard area for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

"What a great day for Sanford. A lot of people worked hard to make this day happen," said Town Council chairman Joseph Hanslip.

The town took ownership of the mill by eminent domain last year. After it is cleaned up, the building where workers once churned out yards of woolen cloth for the Goodall textile empire will be developed by Northland Enterprises, LLC of Portland.

The development project is pegged to cost about \$12.6 million and will either take the form of a combination of commercial and residential units or solely residential units, said Josh Benthien of Northland Enterprises, LLC.

"I'm excited to get started," said Benthien, who pointed out Northland Enterprises LLC has been involved with the project for about two years.

The project is in a Pine Tree Zone which brings tax incentives, and the developers are also seeking historic tax credits specifically geared toward rehabilitation of properties in blighted areas — hence the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Inside, on the first floor, the old floorboards are crusted with years of dust and debris and warped from years of water damage. There are piles of rubble from the old windows that the previous owner removed — and left inside. There are plastic pipes directing water outside the old window spaces — a temporary measure after authorities found that the roof drains were directing water inside the building.

The second floor is equally dusty and dirty, although mostly free of debris.

The beams, however, are as solid as the people who built this mill and those who worked in it — sturdy, structurally sound and yet adaptable to change.

And there's a vision for this place. The residential units on the second floor will have a fine view of Number One Pond and the waterfall from the vast windows that feature segmented arched brickwork and cast concrete sills, said Rip Patten of Credere Associates, the environmental engineering firm organizing the clean-up.

The Sanford Mill was once part of the Goodall empire of textile mills that dotted this community and provided work to thousands. While the Goodall family began producing textiles here in the 1800s, the Sanford Mill, which dates to 1915, marks the company's switch from old wooden mills to brick. It served the company well until 1954, after southern interests purchased the mills and then closed them down.

By 1964, the mill was owned by Eastern Plastics. In the late 1980s, a manufacturing company called Jotko operated here. After Jotko closed, the mill was used for warehouse space but became vacant about a decade ago.

Clean-up will consist of the removal of rubble, asbestos, process piping and some contaminated soils, Patten said.

The clean-up is funded by both direct federal Brownfields grants and money from Brownfields funneled through Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission. The initial clean-up, expected to take about two months, will cost about \$400,000, said Patten.

"I'm thrilled we've got a town that wants to make this happen," said Environmental Protection Agency deputy Brownfields director Myra Blakely. "It is a great thing and it is great when I can get out of Washington and see Brownfields clean-ups in action."



Sanford Town Manager Mark Green stands inside a run-down area inside the Sanford Mill on Monday. The building is the focus of revitalization plans that seek to restore and reuse the old mill space. (JEFF LAGASSE/Journal Tribune)

Blakely credited the EPA Boston regional office for their diligence, along with town officials like Jim Gulnac, who heads the Brownfields projects for the town.

Once clean-up is complete and the owners determine how they'll develop the space, rehabilitation of the 61,000 square foot building is expected to take about a year.

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