

In June 2015, the Somers Board of Selectmen approved the formation of the Somersville Mill Ad Hoc Committee to advise the Selectmen in providing strategic planning options for the Somersville Mill site, which had been destroyed by fire on June 2, 2012. As a result the following members were appointed as volunteers to serve on the Committee: Erik Ness, Tim Keeney, Brad Pellissier, Tim Potrikus and Ralph Williams. The Committee members bring to the table a diverse array of experience and expertise in areas such as environmental law, environmental consultation, town planning, law, energy, research and news reporting. The Committee was assigned the following charges:

1. Identify potential reuse of the Somersville Mill property
2. Identify potential sources of funding to be used to remediate the Somersville Mill property.
3. Identify risks associated with taking title to the Somersville Mill property.

The Committee believes the remediation and restoration of the Somersville Mill site (5 ½ acres) presents the Town of Somers with an unprecedented opportunity to clean up a brownfield in the middle of the village center, restore the natural beauty of the waterfront, create public recreational amenities, return a portion of the property to the tax rolls in a revenue producing capacity and preserve the historic and cultural importance of the site.

**Response to the three questions posed to the Somersville Mill Ad Hoc Committee by the Board of Selectmen:**

**Recommended Reuse Opportunities / Options for the 5 ½ acre Parcel:**

- Recreational use of the property should be a top priority when accommodating subsequent development in accordance with the Planned Development District.
- Consideration should be given to restoring the bridge destroyed by the 1955 flood for pedestrian use, constructing a public boat launch, and developing recreational trails linked with existing State conservation areas, immediately East and West of the site.
- Another priority should be to maintain the historic / cultural heritage of the site to include retention of some existing walls, cornerstones & monuments, and installation of interpretive signage to tell the story of the Somersville Manufacturing Company which occupied the site from 1879 to 1969 and employed as many as 400 workers.
- An MOU should be developed between the Town and the DEEP which considers management of the recreational elements of the site and includes input from the Somers Open Trails group.
- Other subsequent uses: could include commercial, residential or manufacturing and should be determined through an RFP process in accordance with the Planned Development District. The Board of Selectmen should consider input from the

Economic Development Commission.

**Sources of Grant / Loan funds for Site Remediation and Reuse:**

- Connecticut's Office of Brownfield Remediation and Development (DECD / DEEP); municipal ownership of the property will likely be required to access grant funds. The Town's vision for reuse of this property and adjacent parcels will enhance any application in this competitive grants program.
- DEEP Open Space Grant
- Accommodating Town financial support and development incentives will also influence the outcome of any grant application.
- Acquisition by DEEP of recreational land to extend existing State Park.
- Planning Grant as long as no interference with DECD Brownfields Grant.
- Phase III targeted environmental assessment grant.
- USEPA Brownfields Grant
- The Town should consider any other grant opportunities which might be available.

**Whether the Town should take title to the property?**

- Because of the expense of site remediation and other competing properties available for economic use, private interest in this site will be remote without a "clean" determination by the DEEP.
- State grant funds to support cleanup are linked to Town ownership.
- A "clean" site is the highest priority; Town ownership is inevitable as a first step toward eventual reuse.
- Risk of ownership is minimal due to available state liability protection.
- Federal liability is likely very limited.

The Committee received presentations and discussion with over 20 individuals over a period of 12 weeks from June 25 – September 14, 2015, including:

Attorney John Wertam of Shipman & Goodwin, who has over 30 years of experience providing environmental counseling to municipalities and developers, mentioned his solid relationship with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD), Deputy Commissioner Tim Sullivan, encouraged the Town to apply for a Brown Field Remediation grant which requires town ownership of site without financial match. Mr. Sullivan stated a well thought out town proposal would get a high score for this competitive grants program. He also mentioned that the strongest application would be

with a developer in place and the town having a clear vision of what it wants. The goal here is to return the site to productive reuse and fill unmet needs of the town. -

Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), Brown Fields Coordinator Mark Lewis, described the Municipal Brownfields Liability Relief Program which requires town ownership and stewardship of the site. The application should include the submission of a plan and schedule for site investigation, remediation and reuse.

DEEP, Graham Stevens, Director Constituent Affairs, Land Acquisition and Management which oversees Brown Field and Open Space Programs, described the Department's Acquisition Committee and the potential for linkage to the Scantic River Linear Park Greenway, as well as the priority for partnering with municipalities through a management agreement. Mr. Stevens also highlighted the fact that the river frontage of the site connects two existing state conservation areas, the Mill Pond East of the site and the Scantic River Linear Park West of the site.

Town Officials: Town Sanitarian Steve Jacobs (sewers and clean up), Town Engineer Jeff Board (flooding), Water Pollution Control Authority Chairman Jim Batellio (available sewer capacity)

Town Zoning Commission Chairman Jill Conklin discussed issues related to a possible Planned Development District, including the idea that the Somersville section of town could benefit from a village concept as a catalyst for economic development.

Town Attorney Carl Landalino and Town Collection Counsel Adam Cohen of Pullman & Comley. Attorney Cohen stated that the absence for over three years of any communication with the current site owners effectively rendered the site an "abandoned property", and emphasized that if the Town were to take ownership of the site, it should occur as soon as possible to get the cleanup grant process started.

Planimetrics President Glenn Chaulder, who has worked with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development for several years, emphasized the importance of the Town's vision for the site as well as the opportunities of a Planned Development District.

Dick Barlow, First Selectman of Canton, home of the Connecticut's first Planned Development District, discussed how Canton formed an Historic Industrial District for the village of Collinsville in 1999. Mr. Barlow emphasized the extreme latitude which a PDD offers to a developer in making a recommendation to the town and that the biggest impediment to economic development of the site in his town has been private ownership of the target site.

Adjacent commercial property owners Ralph Guisti (Adult Day Care Center) and Mike Eastwood (Eastwood Automotive Machine Shop) discussed the benefits and challenges of using their buildings which were originally part of the Somersville Mill complex. Mr Guisti emphasized the prospects of the site for light manufacturing and the benefits of preserving some of the remnants of existing buildings if possible. Evan Plotkin, the real estate broker for the adjacent old Somersville Grammer School, discussed the beneficial synergy of development that a PDD could provide to the neighborhood.

Recreational reuse of the site: Albert Grant and Arend Knuttel, Directors of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust and the Scantic River Greenway, discussed the potential benefits of leaving some of the site property as conservation land for recreational use. Ann Moses, Chairman of the Somers Open Space & Trails Committee, discussed the benefits of interconnecting conservation and recreational properties, as well as the fact that her Committee could produce volunteers for management and maintenance of the site.

Somers Historical Society President Carol Pyne stressed the importance of the Mill site as a historically significant part of the fabric of the Town of Somers. She emphasized the importance of preserving building cornerstones and other remnant building parts which are on the site.

#### **VISION Statement**

1. Town takes ownership of property at tax sale.
2. Clear rubble & debris and conduct necessary environmental remediation.
3. Restore natural beauty of site and place 2 foot clean soil cap on exposed soils (grant funds).
4. Create passive recreation including trails along river, boat launch, pedestrian bridge using existing piers connecting trails to Scantic River Linear Park Greenway, fish ladder on existing dam which could open fish way from Massachusetts border to Connecticut River.
5. Attract light industrial commercial enterprise along with ancillary commercial activity tied to recreational use, like tackle shop, kayak rental and snack shop.
6. Create historic interpretive park, which retains cornerstones, monuments and

- salvaged building remnants (preceded by a structural engineering evaluation from grant funds).
7. Establish parking for onsite and offsite use to support village concept in Planned Development District (PDD).
  8. Remove existing structures to expand flood zone in accordance with Milone & MacBroom study (possible use of existing STEAP Grant)
  9. Cleanup of this site for beneficial reuse will re-establish a tax revenue producing property and enhance the economic value within the PDD and surrounding village, originally built to support the Mill.

**Action Items:**

- 1) The town should immediately apply to the DEEP for protection under the Municipal Brownfields Liability Relief Program prior to taking title.
- 2) Proceed with town tax foreclosure on the mill property. The cost of remedial action will relate directly to the environmental requirements for subsequent use (estimate of \$1 million based on GEI environmental assessment).
- 3) While awaiting the six-month process for completing tax foreclosure, the town should apply to DECD's Office of Brownfield Remediation and Redevelopment for a cleanup grant (estimate of \$1million based on GEI environmental assessment), with the understanding that no work will begin until title has passed to the Town. The application (next round due November 16, 2015) should emphasize:
  - a) The distressed condition of the property, threats to environmental quality from its continuing dereliction, and the risks to public health and safety.
  - b) The town's desire to preserve and enhance recreational opportunities derived from the mill property's location along the Scantic River.
  - c) The town's intention to promote economic development that will attract jobs and enhance the surrounding village of Somersville and Planned Development District (PDD).
- 4) Apply for a Planning Grant (deadline November 16, 2015) only if it will not in any way compromise DECD Brownfields Remediation Grant.
- 5) The Town should work with consultants to determine how to use already existing grant funds for bridge improvements and flood mitigation to enhance economic development and recreational opportunities.
- 6) The selectmen should begin discussion with members of the town's Zoning Commission and Planning Commission on the merits and methods of establishing a Planned Development District encompassing not only the mill property but several clearly delineated nearby properties (triangle area from school property to post office), in order to establish parameters for both encouraging development of those properties and closely regulating the terms of such development.

7) Assuming that DECD acts favorably on the town's request for a brownfields cleanup grant, the town should apply to DEEP for enhanced protection of the mill property under the Abandoned Brownfield Cleanup Program.

8) The town should apply for a Phase III targeted environmental assessment grant (approximate \$50k).

9) Once the town's land-use commissions have developed regulations for a Planned Development District and DECD cleanup funding has been secured, the town should begin to solicit RFPs for development of the mill land and surrounding properties within that district's borders.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Keeney, Chairman

Brad Pellissier, Vice Chairman

Erik Ness

Tim Potrikus

Ralph Williams