

Somers looking at environmental cleanup for former mill site

By Susan Danseyar
STAFF WRITER

SOMERS — Town officials are looking into state funding that could help mitigate environmental issues at the former Somersville Mill site and allow a proposed mixed-income apartment community to be built on a portion of the property.

WinnDevelopment of Boston is proposing to rent or buy a portion of the town-owned property on the north side of 40 Maple St. and build 80 to 100 apartment units across four floors. The apartments would be a mix of market-value units, affordable units at 80 percent of the adjusted median income of Hartford County, and workforce units at 30 percent of the adjusted median income of Hartford County.

Before the proposed project can go forward, however, a number of environmental issues must be addressed, according to First Selectman Timothy R.E. Keeney. Town officials, WinnDevelopment representatives, and environmental GEI Consultants of Glastonbury recently met to discuss pollutants in the groundwater



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at the site and how they might be dissipated, Keeney said.

The state Department of Economic and Community Development offers grants to help municipalities with environmental remediation, Keeney said. "Should we get funding support, we would go back to WinnDevelopment and let them know what needs to be done to develop the site."

The first step in the current exploration process, Keeney said, is finding out exactly what to apply for in the way of

grant funding because environmental issues have to do with specific use. For example, he said, the proposed mixed-income apartment complex means people would be living on the property, so the developers might have to install a liner to protect future tenants from pollutants.

"We're still looking at the scope of the environmental challenge and what kind of application needs to be filled out," he said.

The property is now being used as open space and Keeney said that is working well for the town. "But Somers needs housing," he said. "WinnDevelopment is very interested in how to get the site cleaned up and ready for development."

The Somersville Manufacturing Co. built the historic mill in 1879. The mill employed hundreds of people for decades and produced woolen fabrics used by high-end clothiers.

After a fire in June 2012 gutted the building, its remnants were razed in 2017. The town received a \$2 million grant from the Department of Economic and Community Development soon after and used it to clear off the property.

The parcel forms the center of the Somersville Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

The developer plans an environmentally friendly building and is expected to apply to the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority for tax credits.

A thoughtful redevelopment of the mill property has been a goal of the community for a decade to create an economic anchor for the village of Somersville and contribute to the town's housing needs, Keeney said in May when officials signed an exclusive agreement with WinnDevelopment to be the developer of the site.

WinnDevelopment is the development arm of the private family-owned WinnCompanies, which has owned, developed, and managed apartment communities in Connecticut for 42 years. The company maintains a regional office in Hartford.

Keeney said the Somersville Mill Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee had decided that the best use for the site would be housing and economic stimulus for the neighborhood.

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