

# Linwood Mill project still a priority

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LINWOOD — Finances continue to be a story in progress, but redevelopment of the Linwood Mill into senior rental housing is still very much on the docket of private and town interests.

Matthew Mittelstadt, on behalf of EA Fish Development of Braintree and property owners and local partners William and Patty Giannopoulos, indicated to selectmen Feb. 8 they are ready to proceed with revamping the landmark mill structure into a \$17.5 million, mixed-use facility.

The onetime textile mill, built in 1866 by two of the Whitin brothers, is pegged to have 75 total senior housing units on the upper floors with 20,00 square feet of commercial and retail space on the lower level. The plan calls for 62 single-bedroom and 13 two-bedroom units.

Mittelstadt said on-site resident services would be coordinated by Peabody Resident Services, Inc.

He thanked the selectmen for

backing the project last summer. And he noted the developers had received full permits last June from the Planning Board, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Conservation Commission.

He also said the project was awarded federal and state historic-building tax credits — one in June 2009 and one in December.

Moreover, he declared, the project has been designated a "Priority Development Site" under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 43D. The section has to do with the expediting of permitting, among other aspects.

Mittelstadt also said the group is reapplying for funding Feb. 25 from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Urban Development.

He said strong local support for the project can only help the developers receive funding. He said there are about 90 projects throughout the state seeking the same kind of state funding the Linwood Mill redevelopers are applying for.

The benefits of the redevelopment to Northridge, Mittelstadt said, are:

- Permanent restoration of a cherished landmark structure.
- An increase of the real estate tax base by the occupation of currently vacant portions of the mill.
- The low impact of seniors on town services.
- The units would count toward the Northbridge affordable-housing requirement set by the state.

Mittelstadt said the developers would like to discuss the possibility of reducing the water-sewer connection fees. He said the average connection fee for a four-bedroom house is about \$7,000. If the mill housing were charged \$7,000 for a one-bedroom unit when seniors are expected to use only about a third as much of those services as a family in a four-bedroom house, he suggested perhaps the connection fee could be decreased accordingly.

As it stands, the development, when completed, would be charged \$498,000 for water and

sewer connections. Mittelstadt called that "a staggering sum."

"We would ask to begin a dialogue with the town for some relief on this," he said. It could be based more on a user fee structure, he suggested.

Selectmen told Mittelstadt that one way of lowering cash investment in sewer connections would be to make sewer line improvements somewhere else in town. Under the law, a developer can do work equivalent to what would be considered a reduction by four times what the development contributes to the system. And the work can take place wherever it is needed throughout the town. The work would be considered to have a specific financial value to complement direct monetary payment for town services like sewers and water.

"We're looking for ways of pushing forward and getting the project done," Mittelstadt told selectmen.