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Early plans presented for redevelopment of BDA mill site

By Dale P. Faulkner Sun staff writer

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Bradford Dyeing Association. Sun file photo

JOHN KOULBANIS

WESTERLY — A representative of the new owners of a portion of the former Bradford Dyeing Association property discussed early-stage plans for the property with the Planning Board on Tuesday.

Aurora Leigh, a project manager for Rockingham Estate LLC, a Pawtucket-based company established in June, reviewed plans and provided early concept drawings. Leigh's description of the plans largely mirrored the description offered to the board by the lawyer John Dorsey in July. Dorsey is the court-appointed special master in the receivership case involving the property.

The project would entail development of townhouse rental units and use of parts of the mill property. In some cases, Leigh said, parts of the mill buildings will be used and other parts torn down. Distinctive saw-tooth roofs would be retained and mill features such as massive wooden beams and brick walls would be retained when possible.

A contractor is about 70% finished with asbestos removal work and the new owners have hired a company to remove old fuel oil and other substances in storage tanks from the property, Leigh said.

The developers also envision a restaurant and space for one or more brewery companies, and a boat assembly company on the old mill property.

The new owners were selected as the potential buyer after a bid process conducted by Dorsey.

"We were really taken in by its location and beautiful surroundings, the river view and historical elements," Leigh said.

The two-level town houses would be rented at market rate or below and would likely attract young families or older couples, Leigh said.

The Dunn's Corners Fire District, which provides fire protection services to Bradford, recently informed Leigh that it had agreed to provide fire protection services to the mill property under a separate agreement. The property has historically not been part of any fire district. Leigh said she expected to receive a draft version of the proposed agreement in four to six weeks.

The project will require a zone change and would be subject to the town's inclusionary zoning ordinance, said Scott D. Levesque, the board's lawyer. The zoning ordinance requires that a portion of a new rental housing development that consists of six or more units be reserved for low- or moderate-income renters.

Some board members expressed enthusiasm for the project.

"This is very exciting opportunity; it would be great to see this kind of work," said Justin M.

Hopkins, a member of the board.

Dorsey said he plans to file an application seeking grant funds to pay for an environmental remediation of old lagoons on the property. If the grant is not approved, Dorsey said, he would likely seek direction from the judge who is handling the receivership case on development of a work plan to address the need for remediation.

The property is currently subdivided into four lots. Dorsey sought the subdivision as a means to facilitate development of the property. The lots are: the lagoons that were used as part of the mill's wastewater treatment system; an 18-acre wooded wetland area that the new owner has agreed to put in the state Department of Environmental Management's open space program; the 500,000-square-foot main mill building that Rockledge Estate now owns; and a fourth area that was created if it is needed as a new location for telecommunications equipment that is now attached to a smokestack rising from the mill. Rockledge is expected to take ownership of the entire property in the future, Dorsey has said.

In 2018 the town petitioned a Superior Court judge to place the property into receivership, a court proceeding that is similar to bankruptcy, after the former owner, BPF Realty LLC, struggled for years to pay local, state and federal taxes and other bills.

Rockingham Estate is owned by Garfield and Rebecca Spencer. The couple is involved with redevelopment of former mill sites in Pawtucket and in Connecticut.

Leigh and Stephen Izzi, a lawyer who represents Rockledge Estate, declined to answer questions after Leigh's presentation to the board.

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