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## Developers to reinvent Sanford mill with 90 apartments, businesses: 'It's going to shine'

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Portsmouth Herald

SANFORD, Maine — While the inferno that destroyed the back tower of the Stenton Trust Mills complex will be long remembered as a sad chapter in the history of Sanford, it turns out that dark day in 2017 produced a silver lining.

Local architect Mike Binette shared that silver lining with the Sanford Planning Board on April 5 when he helped present a well-known developer's proposal to transform the last-standing mill at 13 River Street into housing and commercial spaces.

“The silver lining of the fire is that this is now a bit-size piece,” Binette said. “This is a piece that’s more manageable.”

In other words, if there had not been the blaze, redeveloping both of the Stenton mills would have been significantly more challenging and perhaps less likely to happen. Now, though, with just a single tower on site, the proposed redevelopment would be a “walk in the park for us,” said Binette, who grew up on Brook Street, a few blocks from the city’s mill yards.

“This is really ripe with opportunity,” Binette told the Planning Board. “It’s the right time and the right place.”

## 90 apartments, commercial retail planned

WinnCompanies is proposing to build 90 apartments on the top four floors of the five-story mill and create both commercial spaces and amenities for tenants on the ground floor. The Boston-based developer is known for redeveloping more than 35 historic mills and remaining their longtime owners and managers, according to Adam Giordano, WinnCompanies' assistant manager for the project.

As Binette said of the company, "They don't build and sell. They're going to be here 30 years from now. You'll have a longstanding partner in the community."

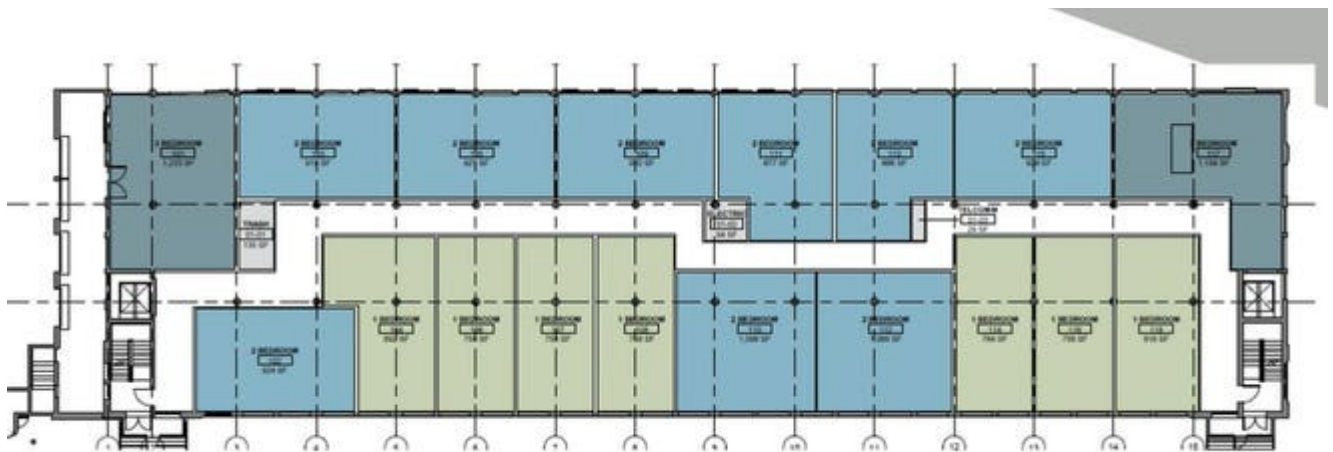


The Planning Board approved the preliminary subdivision application for the project during its April 5 meeting. Code Enforcement Officer Jamie Cole said

the developers will revise their application to meet the town’s conditions and likely will appear before the board again, this time with a final application, at some point during the next couple of months.

Attorney Brad Morin, of Bourque Clegg Causey & Morin, LLC, in Sanford, is representing the developers. He said his clients started meeting with city officials about redeveloping the mill last July.

Morin said the project, once complete, will beautify that section of the mill yard while preserving its historic character. He also said the project will work well alongside the city’s plans to use \$25 million in federal funds to improve downtown infrastructure and create a promenade around Number One Pond, which is located across the street from the Stenton mill.



“It’s something we think is going to benefit the community for decades to come,” Morin said.

## **Mill redevelopment called a 'game changer'**

Mary Hastings, the small business advocate for the Sanford Regional Economic Growth Council, agreed. During a public hearing for the proposal, Hastings praised the developers and called their proposal a “game changer.”

“This project is going to help a really crucial housing deficit that we have,” Hastings said. “This is going to catapult more businesses into the Sanford area, into our downtown.”

City officials previously said a large influx of new residents in the downtown will create a demand for goods and services that the area currently lacks. At least two other separate, unrelated projects in the downtown – the construction of apartment complexes at the corner of School and Bodwell streets and behind Dunkin on Roberts Street – are seeking to fill that need for new residents, as well.



Other cities, such as Biddeford and Dover, New Hampshire, have redeveloped their mills and increased their downtown populations and have seen the economic and cultural benefits that Sanford is now seeking to create.

Binette specifically mentioned Biddeford as an example during his remarks.

**Sanford makeover:**City gets \$25M in federal funds to revitalize downtown

According to Giordano, the rents for the 90 apartment units would be restricted at or below certain percentages of the median income of the area.

For example, he said, a four-person family with an annual household income of less than \$86,360 would qualify for such a unit. As well, a four-person family must earn less than \$67,020 per year to qualify for a unit set at 60% of the area's median income.

Such an arrangement will allow the property owner – WinnCompanies – to take advantage of local, state and federal subsidies, Giordano said.

Giordano added that the project is being designed to attract a wide spectrum of working-class individuals. He cited full-time waitresses, police officers, and educators as examples.

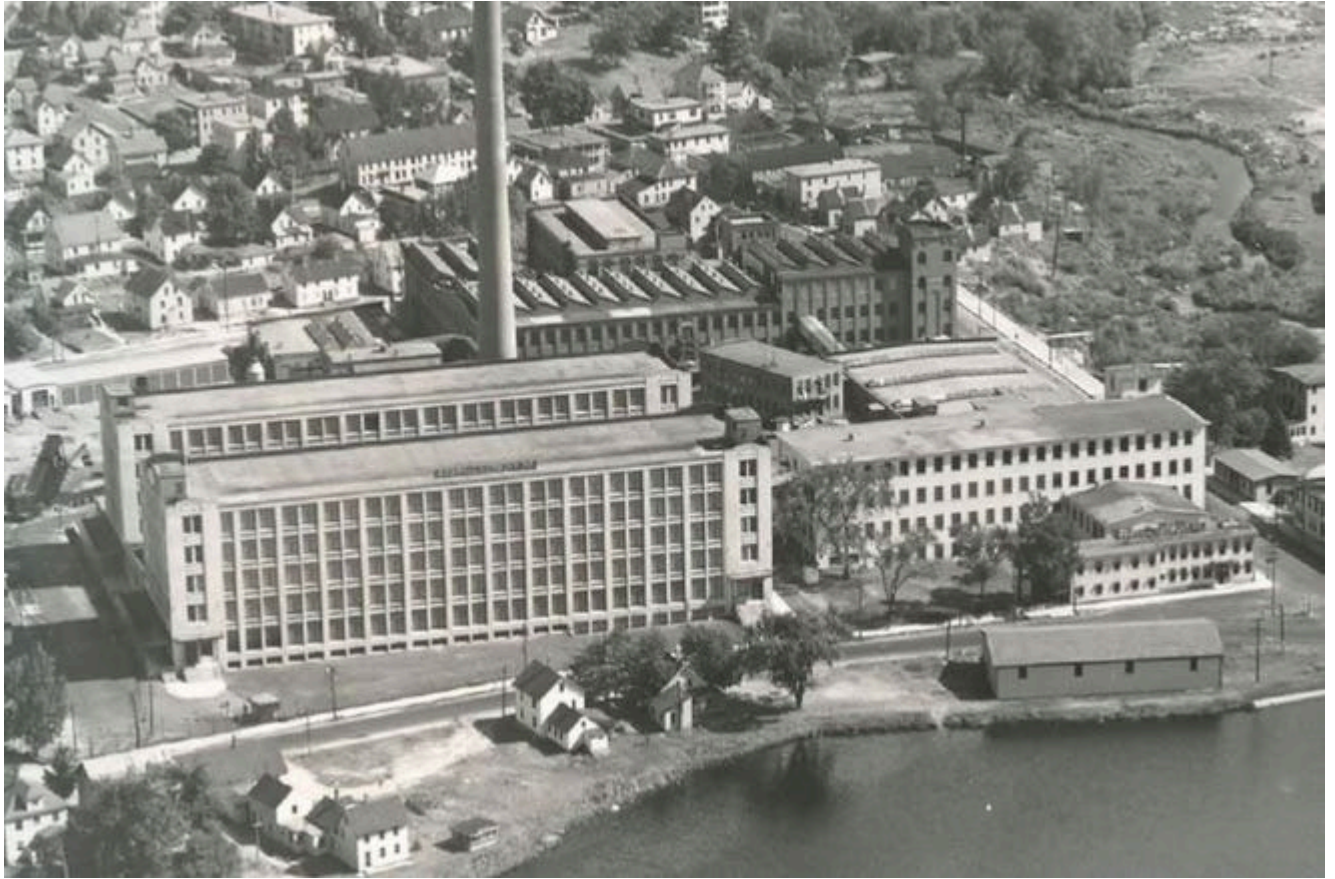
“We are really excited to breathe new life into a site and building that has been long vacant,” Giordano said.

**Big plans:** New owners of mill envision stores, restaurants and more

## **Historic property to get new life**

A lot of history went up in smoke when that rear tower of the Stenton Trust Mills complex burned for hours on the evening of Friday, June 23, 2017. The complex opened in 1922 and was originally where Goodall Worsted Company made its popular Palm Beach Cloth, a lightweight fabric often used in manufacturing men's suits. The two mills were identical in appearance and ran parallel to each other.

The fire was one of the biggest in Sanford's history. More than 150 firefighters from Maine and New Hampshire needed more than 30 pieces of apparatus to battle the inferno and drew water from four hydrants and Number One Pond across the street. The 300,000-square-foot structure was so engulfed that the firefighters' only option was to attack the flames from the outside.



The blaze drew one of the largest crowds in Sanford in recent times. Hundreds of people, maybe even thousands, watched the firefighters as they battled the flames underneath thick, unceasing clouds of pitch-black smoke. People lined the streets and sidewalks, filled Gateway Park and the Mid-Town Mall parking lot, and sat in the front yards of surrounding blocks. Some stood. Some sat in folding chairs, like they would to watch fireworks in those very spots on the Fourth of July.

Three local boys — ages 12 and 13 at the time — were arrested and charged with arson within days of the blaze. Two of them later pleaded guilty to charges of misdemeanor criminal mischief and were sentenced to a year of probation. The third boy pleaded guilty to a charge of criminal mischief.

In the summer of 2019, the Environmental Protection Agency led crews in the demolition of the burned mill, whose charred, skeletal frame had been tilting

at the site for the past two years. The EPA also oversaw efforts to remediate the site and the remaining mill.

If all goes according to plan, construction at the lone-standing Stenton Trust Mill is expected to start in the spring of 2024.

Binette told the Planning Board that everything the developers will do will be dictated by the Maine Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service, as financing from the project will derive from historic tax credits. Binette said both entities have “very rigid” standards for what the mill must look like once the project is complete. “The bottom line is, it’s going to look like the day it was built,” Binette said. “It’s going to shine.”