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Kimberly Keil, Assistant Redding Town Clerk
6 pages*

Special Meeting
of the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee
with the Redding Planning Commission and the Redding Zoning Commission
Wednesday, December 6, 2023, 7:30 PM
Town Hall Meeting Room Meeting
100 Hill Road, Redding CT

Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee Members Present:

Amy Atamian, Chairperson; Aimee Pardee; Dave Pattee; Regina O'Brien; Richard Wenning; Tracy Kulikowski.

Planning Commission Members Present:

Regina O'Brien; James Bacon (Alternate); Toby Wells (Alternate).

Zoning Commission Members Present:

Amy Atamian; Nicole Bricker; Diane Carlino (Alternate).

Also Present: Selectwoman Margaret O'Donnell; Janet August, Recording Secretary; members of the public.

(Note: All committees/commissions had quorums).

Call to Order: Amy Atamian called the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee and the Zoning Commission to order at 7:42pm, and seated Zoning Commission alternate Diana Carlino. Regina O'Brien called the Planning Commission to order at 7:42pm and seated Planning Commission alternates James Bacon and Toby Welles.

1. Presentation: Wire Mill Advisory Annual Report Recommendations:

Ms. Atamian welcomed all committee and commission members to the meeting and began the presentation.

Ms. O'Brien, as a member of both the Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee (the Committee) and Planning Commission introduced the presentation with points from

Town Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) relevant to Georgetown, noting that the POCD provides guidelines in everything the Planning Commission does. Key points included: creating “a vibrant and sustainable mixed-use, transit-oriented locale with distinct identity” with a balance of uses, array of housing; preservation of historic mill buildings; increased tax revenues; and public access to the pond and waterfall areas. A “distinct identity” would be developed with the consensus of the community. Ms. O’Brien stated that the committee recognizes the complexity of the site and its key role in unlocking the potential of Georgetown and the need for coordinated stewardship and planning efforts for both the mill and the village together, due to the synergies that exist between the village and the mill. Ms. Atamian added that the POCD was used as a guide in developing the recommendations made to the BOS in the Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee’s 2023 Annual Report (the Annual Report).

Ms. Atamian identified the members of the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee, noting the subject matter experts of members and which other Town committees and/or commissions they serve on. The committee has members from the Planning, Zoning, and Conservation Commissions, Land Use departments, Water Pollution Control Commission, Economic Development and includes First Selectman Julia Pemberton as an ex-officio member.

Ms. Atamian stated that the presentation would describe recommendations to the BOS as described in the Annual Report including near term actions, and a 5-year plan. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the recommendations with the Planning and Zoning Commissions to get a sense of how the commissioners feel about the committee’s recommendations and review actions that could require funding in FY24.

Ms. Atamian reviewed the Goals for 2029, which is the 40th anniversary of the mill closure, to begin the transformation of the mill site from a liability to an asset. She provided a conceptual map of the site illustrating the 2029 goals, which include improving the Main Office and Machine Shop Buildings, the gateway to the mill site, to improve appearances of the site as seen from the Georgetown Village area, remediating soils in areas adjacent to the pond, creating public access to the pond area, and a public walkway through the site connecting Portland Ave to the Georgetown Village. She noted that recommended actions will improve the site’s aesthetics and safety, stabilize buildings to prevent further deterioration, and encourage further development in the village. Ms. Atamian noted a key recommendation of the Wire Mill committee is to engage a professional planner to help develop a comprehensive plan for the mill site and all of Georgetown. A planner would help to understand the development potential of the whole area, and the resources needed.

The mill site has environmental, safety and aesthetic concerns. The Committee report recommends implementing guidelines from the Planning and/or Zoning Commissions that could limit some uses or practices to keep the site more orderly. She added that some buildings have physical safety issues and could be a liability for the Town. Funding is needed for building stabilization and correction of safety concerns. The goal is to provide safe access

for tenants and the public. Ms. Atamian suggested that public access will allow people to safely use the site, see the buildings, and help us, along with the community, to identify potential future uses. She continues that the planning process and more community engagement would help us determine what is feasible through a planning study and move improvements to both the site and the village forward. She discussed the need for project and site management while work goes forward to oversee subcontractors conducting hazardous building remediation, safety improvements, and to ensure that tenants are complying with lease terms.

Ms. Atamian added that additional goals are continued improvements to the Town website for the mill and conducting additional community outreach including smaller meetings with key stakeholders and the different commissions that may be responsible for implementing parts of the plan and goals. Ms. Atamian reviewed the work that the UCONN TAB program has been doing to support the efforts, including their help with grant applications, reuse planning, and future public outreach. She added that the site economics are dependent upon a resolution of the financial issues with the special taxing district which is within the purview of the Board of Finance (BOF) and the BOS.

Ms. Atamian discussed the funding recommendations in the Annual Report to improve the aesthetics of the site, safety, and remediation, which included: a town-match of \$20,000 for the SHPO grant, immediate building stabilization \$500,000, planning studies \$200,000, a part-time project manager, site cleanup (hauling away junk), etc. The funding recommendation totaled \$880,000.

Budget Recommendations	
Building Stabilization	
\$ 20,000	Town Match for SHPO Planning grant
\$ 500,000	Temporary Building Stabilization
Site Aesthetics, Safety, Property Management	
\$ 60,000	Improvement contracting
\$ 50,000	Property Manager
Planning Studies	
\$ 200,000	Phase I - III, Georgetown Planning
\$ 50,000	Economic Studies
\$ 880,000	Total

Note: the above table is from the Annual Report.

Ms. Atamian reviewed the grant funding received and approved to date and grants applied for, but not yet approved, including two \$200,000 grants received from the State of CT Department of Community Development (DECD), and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) \$2 million grant applied for, and the State Historical Preservation Officer (SHPO) grant. The DECD grants were used for environmental studies and work to determine the level and locations of contaminated areas. The EPA granted, if awarded, would go towards cleanup of areas mentioned in the 2029 vision. The SHPO grant would be used to update the 2015 architectural assessment and plans for building stabilization. Site visits have been conducted with SHPO, DECD, UCONN and the Yale Urban Design Workshop (YUDW), which specializes in community planning in historic brownfield and industrial areas like Georgetown.

Ms. Atamian reviewed the status of the environmental program; Phase I and II are complete, and Phase III will be completed and ready for remedial action plans in 2024, with remediation funded by the EPA grant beginning in late 2024 if awarded.

In the immediate, Ms. Atamian stated that the 2024-2025 Goals are safety, stabilization, aesthetics and beginning an engagement with a planner. These goals would include implementing actions to improve site management and aesthetics, restricting access to dangerous areas, building stabilization, and planning (beginning an engagement with a planner). Ms. Atamian noted that so far, everything the committee has proposed is compatible with any future development, of whatever nature.

2. Panel Discussion - Planning and Aesthetic Working Groups

Ms. Atamian identified the working groups of the Committee and their functions, including environmental and aesthetics, economic development, grants and funding, and communications. These working groups focus on their subject areas and report back to the full Committee.

She suggested that planning, zoning, land use, the BOS and the BOF should all review the report, and see what they would suggest expanding, or funding, and think about the next few budget cycles. The group discussed ideas for funding. Ms. Atamian discussed the planning studies and YUDW and the need to send the planning studies/planner out to bid.

3. Round Table Commissioner Comments

Ms. Atamian pointed out that going forward, much input will be needed from the land use commissions and the Planning Commission. She asked rhetorically if the committee should expand its scope to include all of Georgetown? Would a charge from the Planning Commission be needed? Does the Planning Commission want to move forward with an overall plan? Do they want to take charge? How should this work? Ms. Pardee noted that the Planning Commission will need to begin working on the next version of the Town's POCD, so this effort may also need to be considered in terms of planning support. Mr. Welles opined

that development of the site and village needs a municipally led approach. Boards and commissions need to support and guide the plan forward. He opined that the support of these groups is necessary to have a coherent and well-developed plan, and also for demonstrating to funding sources the commitment of the Town. Mr. Bacon agreed with Mr. Welles' remarks and discussed the need for a site manager and additional roles such as a construction manager and project manager in the future.

Ms. Carlino and Mr. Pattee expressed the need to manage the tenants and review the leases to ensure that contractual controls are in place, and that liabilities for the Town are reduced. Site management and the need for a site manager and a project manager were discussed. Ms. Pardee provided a summary of the current tenants and described the types of dumping (mattresses, tires) and debris found throughout the site. A discussion was held on how the tenants are managed, and the need for lease reviews for contractual obligations of the parties and evaluating market rents. Issues raised included tenants using more space than leased (mostly outside), and subletting. Discussed the value of having a town employee as a site manager (even if part-time), who would provide guidance to tenants, ensure tenants comply with lease provisions, increase safety and security, reduce, or eliminate unwanted activities at the site, and be supervised and reportable to a Town employee, as well as provide reporting to the appropriate volunteer committees and commissions. Jim Bacon noted that as the project moves forward and grows larger, a construction manager and/or project manager would be needed to oversee contracted repair and/or remediation work and future development. Ms. Atamian pointed out that the committee had been talking about part-time positions, but full-time positions would include the cost of benefits in addition to the wages. Toby Welles emphasized that we need competent people with specific skills set and knowledge based on role, e.g., site manager, construction manager, project manager.

Ms. Atamian stated that the Georgetown Village Restoration Committee reviewed the mill site committee's Annual Report and gave very favorable comments. That committee stated they liked the idea of managing the aesthetics of the mill site and felt that it would help with Georgetown redevelopment efforts. Attendees discussed the need to stage the remediations work and limit public access during this work. Toby Welles pointed out that the location of Route 107 has created a natural barrier between the site and the village. Mr. Pattee discussed the proposed pedestrian walkway through the site and other walking areas that could be developed in the future.

Ms. O'Brien asked about the urgency of stabilization of certain buildings. Ms. Atamian stated that a prior report (2015) had prioritized which buildings needed attention first, and the recent engineering report from Tighe & Bond identified which buildings could be reused and which were either not reusable or would incur a high cost to repair. Ms. Atamian stated the \$500,000 recommendation in the Committee's plan is an escalation of the \$400,000 stabilization costs outlined in the 2015 implementation report but did not take into consideration further deterioration since that time. Mr. Wenning discussed the need to do further study to firm up the estimates.

Mr. Wenning opined that these improvements could enhance rental income on occupied spaces, and ready other spaces for future value. Ms. Atamian notes that a consensus within our commissions will help guide what should be done and how to fund it. Mr. Welles commented on the community-building uses, such as stores, restaurants, and the need to have controlled development, and the potential cost impacts on public services.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Adjournment

Ms. Atamian adjourned the meeting of the Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee and the Zoning Commission at 8:82pm, and Ms. O'Brien adjourned the Planning Commission at 8:52pm.

Submitted by
Janet August, Recording Secretary

A Zoom recording of this this meeting is available at:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/nySMtd-P7eQB0j3PMtT3T9rC2vYwvMrRGU7DCqgsodDCFG-cFMDLcyp42B1StUS.llypOZqKVEaAB8zI>

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Town of Redding Website link to documents about the Wire Mill:

[Wire Mill Documents](#)

[Wire Mill Advisory Committee – Annual Report](#)