



Biddeford-Saco-OOB
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New life for another mill

Development brings more housing to city

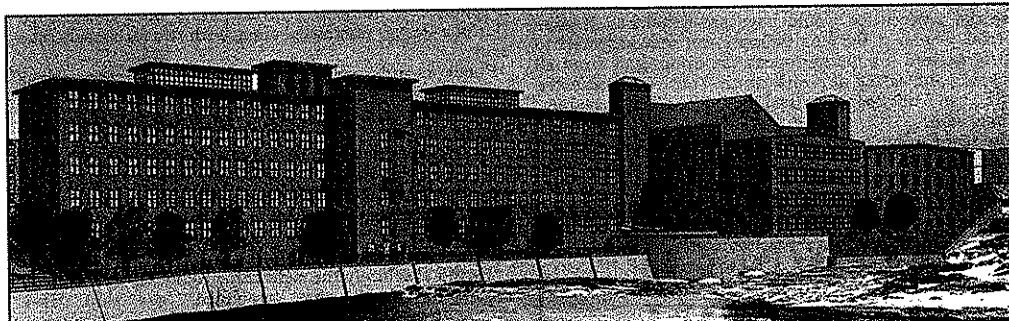
By Gillian Graham
Staff Writer

Developer Nathan Szanton has discovered he enjoys breathing life into old buildings.

Standing in Biddeford's former Laconia No. 1 building, he pointed to huge granite wall blocks, beveled edges around the windows and views of the Saco River.

"It gives it so much character. We can't afford to put those levels of details in buildings today," he said. "I'm awfully fond of this building. I just find it so fascinating."

Szanton - who is renovating an old building for the first time - spoke of the future of the 80,000-square-foot building shortly after a groundbreaking ceremony Monday afternoon to celebrate the start of a project that will create 66 mixed-income apartments in a former Riverdam Mill building.



A rendering of The Mill at Saco Falls shows what the apartment complex will look like from across the Saco River. The complex will be built in the former Laconia No. 1 building. (Image courtesy Maine Workforce Housing)

The \$14.4 million project will separate one mill building from the 10-building Riverdam Mill complex to create The Mill at Saco Falls. The project, being developed by Szanton and Robert CS Monks of Maine Workforce Housing, is

expected to be complete by early fall.

Stephen Goodrich, who bought the complex in 2008, owns

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Mill

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the remaining Riverdam Mill buildings. The buildings were constructed starting in 1845 and were originally used for cotton manufacturing.

While city and state officials praised the project, workers cleared a loading dock nearby in preparation for tearing down a brick connector between two buildings. Szanton said tearing down the connector will allow views and easy access to the Saco River.

Monks said the project is not possible without the support of state and city officials and other mill developers. He said he would like to see all of the city's mill buildings renovated in the next five years.

"It really takes a city - not just a city but an entire state - to renovate a mill," he said.

Szanton said 40 of the 66 units will be rented to families who earn 50 percent or less of York County's median income. The remaining apartments will be rented at market value.

Each unit will include heat and hot water, free wireless Internet, energy-efficient appliances, access to a fitness center and theater room, a parking spot and bicycle and kayak storage.

Szanton said the building's "green" features will include solar-powered domestic hot water, motion-sensitive common area lights, super-insulated walls and dedicated bike and kayak storage.

"This project will turn a beautiful but



Crews remove a loading dock from a section of Riverdam Mill Monday afternoon as part of a \$14.4 million project to create The Mill at Saco Falls. The section of building behind the debris will be removed to allow for better river views and easier access to the falls below. (Gillian Graham photo)

empty and forlorn structure into an energy efficient and environmentally friendly building that will provide housing to a diversity of income groups," he said.

Rent of income-restricted apartments will be \$560 for a one-bedroom unit; \$665 for a two-bedroom unit; and \$770 for a three-bedroom unit. Market rate units are \$760 per month for a one-bedroom unit and \$890 per month for a two-bedroom unit.

Maine Housing Director Dale McCormick said the "wonderful" project will reinvigorate

downtown Biddeford while providing low-income housing for working families. The Maine State Housing Authority is providing \$600,000 in deferred loans and an additional \$6.2 million in tax exchange and tax credit assistance program funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Mayor Joanne Twomey said it is important for the building to include units working families can afford.

"This is the new vision of Biddeford," she

said. "We're on the move."

City Council President Bob Mills agreed with Twomey that providing low-income housing is "very important" to the city. He said the property will be a "phenomenal asset" to the city and reflects the community's working mill tradition.

Applications currently are being accepted for apartments, which are expected to be ready by October.

To request an application or more information, call 871-1080.