

Selectmen support \$20 million mill housing project in Newport

By ARCHIE MOUNTAIN Argus Champion October 3rd, 2019



NEWPORT — With the support of the Newport Board of Selectmen, the Newport Mills Project has advanced to the starting line.

And if all goes as planned, it will cross the finish line and be ready for occupancy in the fall of 2021.

At stake is conversion of the former five-story mill building (Gordon Woolen Mill) on Sunapee Street -into workforce apartments.

On Sept. 16, two board members, Todd Fratzel and Barry Connell, said they needed time to further study the proposal. Fratzel said he had received many telephone calls from Newport citizens expressing concerns about the project.

At that meeting, developer Kevin Lacasse of New England Family Housing handed out a thick stack of printed material for the board members to review.

After reviewing the contents of the information packet, Fratzel said all his concerns were dealt with and he threw his full support behind the project as did Connell and the remaining three selectmen, Jeff Kessler, Bill Wilmot Jr. and John Hooper II. The vote was 5-0.

Lacasse sought the backing of the Board of Selectmen before applying for a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant through Sullivan County.

Before taking the vote Monday night, Lacasse had an opportunity to answer several more questions from board members. He told the board a construction manager and architect have already been selected to handle the project.

Connell wanted to know what is planned to make the area around the big building safe for kids. "Fencing will be erected along dangerous parts of the river," Lacasse revealed. The main branch of the Sugar River flows past the mill building.

Lacasse talked about the projected time frame that could allow construction to start in June of 2020.

In response to a question, Lacasse said the silo currently on the property would be removed.

At the end of the discussion, the selectmen agreed to furnish a letter of support that Lacasse can use as the paperwork and financing for the project continues.

Town Manager Hunter Rieseberg expressed concern for the condition of the sidewalk that passes by the front of the building along Sunapee

Street that would be utilized by young students walking to Newport schools.

Lacasse said the Town of Newport could also apply for a separate grant earmarked for repair work on that sidewalk.

At the earlier meeting, Lacasse said the \$20 million investment would provide additional housing in Newport. "Right now there are few vacancies in town," he stated.

A spectator at that meeting said at this time Newport has a vacancy rate of less than 1 percent.