



West Mill demolition begins

By Garrin Marchetti
Friday, October 30, 2015

NORTH ANDOVER — Demolition on a portion of the West Mill on High Street as begun, another step in the transformation of the historic Davis and Furber Mill complex town officials hope will heighten activity in the downtown area.

Tocci Building Companies started work on the middle section of the mill within the last two weeks, according to North Andover Director of Community and Economic Development Eric Kfoury. Tocci has been employed by RCG LLC, the real estate firm which owns the West Mill, to demolish the building. “There’s a lot of good work going on down there,” Kfoury said Thursday. “It looks to be going well, and everyone I’ve talked seems happy with the progress so far.”

Residents may have a difficult time actually seeing the construction, since most of the demolition has taken place behind the middle section of the mill. The section was once occupied by Schneider Electric and connected to the offices of Converse Inc, according to Town Manager Andrew Maylor.

The majority of the section will be completely torn down and transformed into a surface level parking lot to support current and future commercial and residential space, according to Maylor. In addition, crews will leave a portion of the building to be reconstructed in the future.

“The section (being demolished) was built, I believe, in the early-’90s, so we are not tearing down any of the real historic sections of the mill,” Maylor said Thursday.

David Steinbergh, a principal with RCG, confirmed the demolished section was a relatively newer manufacturing building which had taken up about two acres of space. The proposed 150-spot parking lot and landscaping design will help “continue the redevelopment of the mixed-use community,” Steinbergh said.

“This (demolition) is a critical step in developing the site,” Steinbergh said. “The parking and landscaping will be more convenient to the other businesses there and keep bringing people to the mill. We’re very excited to see how this turns out.”

For nearly a century, The West Mill had been home to the Davis and Furber Machine Shop. Later, Schneider and Converse moved in and created many jobs for area residents following the closing of Davis and Furber. Schneider moved out of the mill to Andover in April 2014, while Converse departed for its new headquarters in Boston’s waterfront district last April.

RCG purchased the West Mill in February 2014, seven years after it bought the East Mill directly across the street. The East Mill, 120 Water St., has become a thriving downtown destination since being purchased by RCG, boasting popular eateries Jaime's Restaurant, Stachey's Pizza and Good Day Cafe, as well as other businesses and apartments.

Since Converse's move last spring, the West Mill has already welcomed several new tenants, including Taste Buds Kitchen, a culinary entertainment business which provides cooking classes for adults and children, and The Maker Mill, a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) enrichment center for guests of all ages.

"We're up to about 20 tenants now," Steinbergh. "When we took the mill, we went in knowing Schneider and Converse were leaving, so we basically had to start from scratch. We're happy with the tenants we've gotten, and we continue to look for more."

Seventeen residential units, which face onto Water Street, are also near completion in the West Mill and are expected to be done by the end of the year, according to Steinbergh. There are future plans to add more condominiums and apartments as well.

Steinbergh and town officials are excited with the progress the West Mill has made since the springtime, which has only solidified their opinions that the space could bring substantial economic improvements to the downtown area in the form of jobs, housing and retail options.

"The renovations are really in line with what we want to accomplish, which is creating a space for life beyond 5 p.m.," Kfoury said. "We're all excited about all the transformations RCG is helping bring to the town."