

ROADMAP TO MILL REDEVELOPMENT SEMINARS

June 12, 2012 Whitin Mill, Whitinsville, MA
June 14, 2012 Bates Mill Atrium, Lewiston, ME
June 26, 2012 Belknap Mill, Laconia, NH

Background:

For more than a century mills and the manufacturing jobs they created, were the driving force of the local economy in New England. However with gains in efficiency and an emerging global market, many of these manufacturing processes were shifted overseas, and as a result, mills throughout New England were closed, creating numerous brownfield sites. Now, many of the communities in New England are struggling to make use of these vacant, abandoned and often contaminated buildings left behind after the mills have closed. After completing extensive research on mill redevelopment in New England states, the NJIT TAB team looked into the issues of redevelopment and prepared a comprehensive agenda for mill redevelopment seminars in three New England states: Massachusetts, Maine and New Hampshire.

Program:

As a result of the NJIT TAB research, experts that have a background in various aspects of mill redevelopment were invited to speak at the seminars. The speakers included environmental experts, developers, architects, economic development, government regulators, historic preservation experts, and community leaders. The day-long seminars were held in redeveloped mill buildings in Whitinsville, Massachusetts; Lewiston, Maine; and Laconia, New Hampshire. The agendas for each seminar consisted of the most pressing environmental, physical and financial issues for each state and were presented by experts in their fields to a diverse and interactive audience. The agenda was divided into thematic parts of

- Site Assessment and Cleanup,
- Managing and Reducing Environmental Impacts for Mill Redevelopment projects,
- Successful Redevelopment Case Studies,
- Structural and Infrastructural Issues,

- Historic Preservation and
- Financing the Redevelopment Process.

The framework was the same for all seminars but the specifics changed according to the redevelopment priorities of each state.

Copies of these presentations and the agendas can be found at <http://www.njit.edu/tab/downloads/index.php>

Summary:

There were approximately 75, 40 and 30 participants, respectively in Whitinsville, Lewiston and Laconia seminars. The attendees included representatives from regional planning organizations; economic development groups; state, county and municipal governments; and private consultants and developers.

Some transferrable topics that emerged during the three seminars are provided below:

- A thorough assessment must be done to identify hazardous materials, as they may be found in many hidden places like sealants in mill buildings. The removal of the hazardous materials needs careful planning. The participants noted that the state and federal grant application processes helped them to get familiar with their sites.
- While planning the redevelopment process, information about flooding should be updated with the help of agencies like FEMA.
- Large-scale redevelopment cases like Ludlow Mills, Bates Mills and Pepperell Mill showed the audience ways of creatively using financing options and physical planning methods for successful redevelopment. These projects also generated a lot of interest from the participants and turned out to be lively interactive discussions.
- When encouraged, the communities of mill towns get engaged into the development process as part of retaining their collective memory and identity. Many of the affected towns are small in size and need to see the mills in use again which helps the finances as well as the morale of the communities in economic distress. Rural mill towns particularly face more challenges in development since the demand for space is low, however creative uses (like data storage, mushroom farming) can help the communities to create demand.

- A key strategy for successful mill redevelopment that was often cited by the participants was to establish public/private partnerships throughout the many stages of the process.
- Participants noted that a platform to share knowledge and experience in mill redevelopment can be very useful and can help the towns to network.
- Energy-efficiency stood as a pressing issue in sustainable mill redevelopment but examples showed that a thorough feasibility study is necessary to avoid costly solutions which rely on unpredictable environmental conditions, like the amount of rainfall or the strength of the water flow in rivers.
- Apart from the deteriorating roof structures, parking is the most common infrastructure problem encountered in mill redevelopment cases and requires a collaborative approach from the towns and the developers.
- State and federal historic tax credits were a key topic in financing because the participants were either not well informed about these tax programs or they were confused about the use of it in combination with other funding options. Financing sessions devoted a good portion of their time slot to clear the confusions or take questions about the use of historic tax credit.
- Community participation or community's development of the old mills – like that in Whittin Mill project- is crucial in achieving social sustainability. A case study where community is part of the development process moves faster and brings in positive externalities to the city where the mill is located.
- Coordination of various stakeholders – from environmental agencies to non-profits- has to be done at the beginning of the development process to move the project forward on all fronts. Some cases showed the specific development corporations established for the mill redevelopment like the Lewiston Development Corporation.
- Not all of the mill redevelopments are done by private developers and a good example for that was the Whittin Mill developed by the Alternatives community. In the small town of Whittinsville, the mill became the venue for the community life for people with disabilities. With a social agenda, a mill redevelopment project can find other funding opportunities and create surplus social value for the town.