

Old Town to purchase defunct mill land, warehouses with hopes to redevelop property

BY NOK-NOI RICKER
BDN STAFF

OLD TOWN — City leaders, after hearing just one question about a proposed \$3 million bond to purchase the 40-acre parcel of land and some warehouses along the Penobscot River where the Expera Old Town mill once operated, unanimously approved moving forward with the process.

The old mill property is owned by a consortium of liquidators and still home to the University of Maine's Technology Research Center. City leaders hope the property can be redeveloped.

Town councilors on Thursday held the second public hearing on the bond for the parcel and 400,000 square feet of warehouse space. The one question was: "What happens with the rest of those buildings?"

"At this point we're not really sure," David Mahan, council president, responded. "We don't have that big of a picture yet."

The last operator of the

mill, Expera Specialty Solutions of Kaukauna, Wisconsin, closed the facility at the end of 2015, displacing 195 workers.

A consortium of liquidators known as MGFR LLC, which includes the Boston-based Gordon Brothers Group, PPL Group LLC of Illinois, Rabin Worldwide of California and Capital Recovery Group LLC of Connecticut, purchased the mill's land, buildings, property and equipment in January. The same liquidators purchased the shuttered Lincoln Pulp and Tissue mill.

Equipment and items within the two closed mills in Old Town and Lincoln were sold at auction in April.

The plan is to lease the warehouse space to pay off the bond for the land, and then sell the property down the road, Mahan said at the first public hearing.

"The money from the leases would offset the bond payment," he said of the estimated \$253,000 annual bond bill.

UMaine has agreed to pay \$95,000 per year to lease the space from Old Town, if the city completes the purchase, Jake Ward, UMaine's vice president of innovation and economic development, said last week.

UMaine currently pays nothing but utilities for the month-to-month lease for the research center, which opened five years ago and is located in the mill's former finished product storage area on the southern portion of the site.

Researchers within UMaine's Forest Bioproducts Research Institute are working on campus to create and commercialize new wood-based bioproducts that they test on a larger scale at the research center.

Mahan said after the meeting Thursday that the lease with UMaine has not been signed but he did not believe the amount Ward mentioned was accurate, and that he could not discuss the second warehouse lease at all.

"We voted, but we still need to sign the paperwork," Mahan said.

Korean War armistice remembered at Bangor ceremony by veterans



People gather at the Maine Korean War Memorial in Bangor in 2010 to commemorate the signing of the armistice on July 27, 1953. Veterans gather at the memorial every July 27 to mark the ceasefire.

BY NOK-NOI RICKER
BDN STAFF

BANGOR — Two dozen Korean War veterans who made it home 63 years ago when America's "Forgotten War" ended with a ceasefire came together Wednesday to remember their fallen brothers-in-arms.

They gather at 10 a.m. every July 27 to mark the end of the war in 1953 when an armistice halted the conflict after claiming the lives of nearly 55,000 U.S. troops, 245 who called Maine home.

"It was a three-year war. A very bitter, bitter war," John Wedin, secretary of the Burton-Goode-Sargent Chapter 1 of the Korean War Veterans Association, said Thursday. "The capital Seoul was captured and lost and captured again

three times."

The names of the lost Mainers are inscribed on a granite memorial built at Mount Hope Cemetery by veterans and volunteers. Two other names of soldiers who grew up in the state but settled elsewhere have been added since the memorial was dedicated in 1992, Wedin said.

Ed Davis of Orland, president of the Burton-Goode-Sargent Chapter 1, which is the only Korean War Veterans Association chapter in Maine, spoke at the annual gathering.

He reminded people that the time of the 10 a.m. ceremony reflects the time the ceasefire was signed in 1953, which was 10 p.m. in Panmunjom, Korea.

As the years have past, the number of Korean War veterans continues to di-

minish, Wedin said.

"When we started out in '92, we had just over 100 members, and now we have 56," he said, adding that some of the members are spouses and associate members.

"We're all at least 82 or older," Wedin said later of the surviving Korean War veterans. "We are too old to even march now, so we have the Marine Corps League do our honor guard."

About 35 people gathered at the Mount Hope Avenue memorial for the ceremony on Wednesday. Invited guest speaker Consul General of the Republic of Korea Yong Joo was unable to make the event.

"We do this three times a year — Memorial Day, Veterans Day and the [anniversary of the Korean War] armistice," Wedin said.

Bangor Exchange Street block of buildings for sale



Six buildings on Exchange Street in the block with the old Bangor Hydro building are up for sale and can be seen Thursday in Bangor.

BY NICK MCCREA
BDN STAFF

BANGOR — For \$1.95 million, most of a downtown city block can be yours.

The out-of-state owner of a group of six largely vacant buildings lining Exchange Street has put them up for sale.

The block includes structures on Exchange Street between its intersections with State and York streets. The most prominent building is the former Bangor Hydro Electric Co. headquarters at the corner of State and Exchange street. There's even a grand ballroom on the top floor of the building at the corner of Exchange and York streets. Technically, it's all one 53,000-square-foot property, as all the buildings are interconnected.

Tanya Emery, Bangor's economic development director, called the buildings "an incredible opportunity."

"It has been largely underutilized for at least a decade," she said. "It's a beautiful [property], including many historic and architecturally significant features, and has been quite well preserved."

The property is owned by an LLC launched by Eaton W. Tarbell Jr. -- who is the son of a well-known, bow tie-clad Bangor architect by the same name. Eaton Tarbell Sr. designed about 2,500 buildings during his lengthy career, notably the former Bangor Auditorium, the Vine Street School in Bangor, Bangor High School, Waterville Junior High School and the Maine Center for the Arts at the University of Maine. He died in 1992.

The properties are managed by Keystone Management, a New Hampshire firm that manages properties in Maine, New Hampshire and North Carolina.

The buildings have been largely empty for more than a decade, and there's a con-

voluted history behind that. In 2004, Bangor Hydro sold three of the buildings to PROTEA Behavioral Health Services, which was then a rapidly expanding organization that already owned the other properties on the block. Two years later, PROTEA was acquired by Sweetser, the state's largest private nonprofit mental health organization.

Around the same time, the entire block was purchased by Eaton Tarbell Jr.'s New Hampshire-based LLC, according to Keystone. In 2007, Sweetser shuttered the Bangor branch after it lost a significant chunk of its state funding. Sweetser had only recently entered the 10-year lease on the property, and it continued paying rent, and maintained some office space, but occupied less than 30 percent of the property, according to Keystone.

That lease expired in June, opening the option to redevelop or sell the buildings. The LLC opted to sell. John Bonadio of Maine Commercial Realty is brokering the sale along with Pete Laney of Century 21 Venture Ltd.

The \$1.95 million pricetag is a bargain compared to the purchase price a decade ago, Bonadio said. The last time the block sold, it went for more than \$5 million -- though it was lumped together with a significantly smaller property in Portland.

Combined, the buildings have an assessed value of more than \$1.72 million, according to city records. The land they sit on is assessed at \$269,100.

Emery posted that the buildings had gone up for sale on social media Thursday afternoon.

Jennifer Simpson, who owns Jennifer Lynn Photography across Exchange Street, said that soon after those posts went up, a steady stream of people in suits started walking the length of the block looking in windows.

The block has a long, rich history. The three-story brick structure on the corner of Exchange and York streets, known as the Nichols Block, dates back to 1892. It was designed by prominent Bangor architect Wilfred E. Mansur. The hall on the top floor housed social functions, concerts and dances. It was one of the few buildings on Exchange Street to survive the Great Fire of 1911, which devastated that section of downtown.

The granite-and-brick building at the other end of the block, the former Bangor Hydro headquarters, was built in 1915 to house a bank. This too was designed by Mansur, who was behind dozens of buildings built in the wake of the fire.

The one-story structure in the middle of the block appears to be relatively new, compared to its taller neighbors, which are about a century old.

For many Bangor residents and visitors, the city's downtown ends at the Exchange Street block. The origins of that feeling stretch back to the city's Urban Renewal efforts in the 1960s, when dozens of historic structures and aging commercial spaces and apartments along the rest of Exchange Street were torn down to clear the way for more modern office spaces and parking lots. The block between State and York streets, however, was left standing, as were the buildings on the opposite side of the street.

If new life is brought to the Exchange Street block in the form of shops, restaurants or apartments, the downtown feel could return to Exchange.

"I can actually see this building from my office window, so I've gazed at it long enough to wonder who will bring it back to life," Emery said. "The city is excited to see what comes next."

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