

Barber Mill project generates interest Mayor calls for public meeting, Councillor sees restoration need

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By Dexter, B. - Toronto Star

GEORGETOWN—Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette says he is intrigued by a multi-million-dollar venture to restore and redevelop the site of Georgetown's historic Barber Paper Mill beside the Credit River. The details, outlined in *New in Homes* last month, involve preservation of most of the 13 derelict buildings at the 1854 mill site at Maple Ave. and River Dr. Construction of a 14-storey condominium and a 48-room country inn are also planned. In all, 245 condo suites are proposed. Nearly all parking for the project would be underground.

Victor Boutin, a Brampton resident and an owner of that city's Sota Glazing Inc. and Everlast Restoration Inc., bought the property under a power of sale last year. He vows to transform the site of more than five hectares. Boutin grew up across the river from Quebec City, appreciates old stone architecture and says "it would be a crime" to let the heritage of Georgetown go to waste. Bonnette, noting that the site makeover is estimated at \$75 million, says that it is rare to find someone willing to take on heritage restoration at a derelict site.

The Town of Halton Hills plans to hold a public meeting on the project this fall, Bonnette says. The proposed height of the condo will be an issue, he says, as the municipality now limits buildings to six storeys, but a site specific exemption could be considered. Ward 2 Town Councillor Joan Robson, who represents residents in the mill area, says she would "absolutely love" to see preservation and redevelopment of the mill site. "To see any part of it preserved would be wonderful," she says. "I don't see any problem with the condo. We are short of that type of housing in the town anyway. We need that desperately. With this site it's all a matter of how it's done."

Jim Anderson of Archicon Canada Inc., the Toronto architects hired by Boutin, says that before submitting a proposal for public scrutiny the firm went through a number of designs to deal with environmental and other issues. He says the condo will be tucked into a hollow below a steep hill at the south end of the site, mitigating the environmental impact of the building. "It's very challenging to try and build within the limits of the existing site," Anderson says, "and this involves almost every aspect of architecture — from heritage restoration to building within flood sensitive and environmentally sensitive areas, and doing high-rise development." Anderson says Boutin is committed to the project and "he has already jumped through a lot of hurdles that a number of developers wouldn't have the patience to deal with."

The Barber Mill goes back to 1854 when four immigrant brothers from Ireland established a paper mill on the Credit River. In 1888 one of their sons, John Roaf Barber, equipped the mill to make wood pulp using hydroelectric power generated three kilometres downstream. The buildings on the site, totally 100,000 square feet, have been abandoned since 1984. The Ontario Heritage Foundation marked the property with a sign in 1977 and its official designation as a national heritage site is being sought by Town of Halton Hills.

For more information about the mill project go to <http://www.thebarbermill.com> or call 905-846-9944.

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