

Gilbert & Bennett

The Amazing Opportunity in Front Us!

by Howard Sherman

In a recent Town of Redding press release it was reported that the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of Redding in the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill foreclosure proceedings. The persistent efforts of our First Selectman Julia Pemberton played a major role in getting this result.

This was an enormous victory!

It is also arguably is the single biggest opportunity for Redding in a very long time. It opens the door to drive the redevelopment of the long abandoned Gilbert & Bennett Mill and surrounding area and in doing so, enhance the quality of the Redding Experience.

Thoughtfully done, this project can attract new residents and appropriate commercial enterprises to our town and establish an expanded tax base that can be utilized to address the towns education, infrastructure and social services needs. Just imagine a vibrant, eco-friendly center developed in a way that is consistent with character of Redding were people can work, live and enjoy that also generates economic benefit to our town.

This is a huge opportunity as well as a tremendous undertaking!

For those not so familiar with the history of Gilbert & Bennett, here is a very brief recap.

- Gilbert & Bennett & Company was formed in 1832. The business focused largely on wire production for a variety of uses including being mobilized to support the war efforts during WWII. It was in operation until 1998 when it filed for bankruptcy protection.
- In 2001, The Town of Redding enlisted architect and developer resources to understand the possible uses for this site. A mixed usage “village” concept was envisioned that encompassed the wire mill and adjacent area.
- In 2002 a developer presented a proposal that reflected the architect and developer recommendations and acquired the deed for development.
- While initial infrastructure and environmental work was done, the project did not move to completion and the developer defaulted on the loans.

As a result, the Town of Redding moved to foreclose on the property which ultimately went the CT Supreme Court where they ruled in our favor after years of legal actions. Having gotten to where we are now, we need to recognize the incredible efforts of First Selectman Julia

Pemberton in successfully pursuing a legal remedy that has now placed the town in the driver's seat. Thank you Julia!

And now the hard work begins to create a new vision for the wire mill and greater Georgetown area. And we have many factors that make this opportunity and the timing particularly critical.

For example, one of the unexpected impacts of the Covid crisis has been the significant exodus from New York. This has resulted in a revitalized housing market and increased demand across Fairfield County, including Redding. The wire mill would seem to be an ideal site to attract residents and families.

Covid also has led to an emerging trend for businesses headquartered in New York to seek smaller "Hub" centers for their employees outside of the city to allow for remote working. Many expect this to be a long-term trend. The wire mill could be an ideal setting for this type of "hub" within the historic restoration of the wire mill property. We also share the challenge of affordable housing for our seniors. Our population of older and "empty nesters" is growing and as stunning as Redding is, offering housing alternatives in walking proximity to a revitalized Georgetown would be a uniquely special addition that would in no way impact Redding's vast, bucolic character.

Finally, the ability to integrate art and/or entertainment space to this large 58 Acre redevelopment footprint would bring a new "pulse" to our community. Clearly the opportunities abound for a vision for the development of the Wire Mill and greater Georgetown area. While it needs to be consistent with our town culture it can and should be additive to "The Redding Experience" and help generate economic support for our town's overall needs. I would hope that the process for establishing this vision and bringing it to life is quickly defined and integrates public voices.

As an engaged citizen in Enhancing Redding's Future, I can truly say this is one of the most exciting opportunities in front of us!