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Ground broken on Montgomery Mill renovation

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Journal Inquirer

Feb 10, 2018

WINDSOR LOCKS – History repeated itself Friday in a second public-private partnership that many believe will allow the decaying Montgomery Mill building thrive once more.

The first partnership occurred in 1825, when politicians granted tax breaks to the mill that set off a booming local economy.

The second partnership was celebrated on Friday when some 100 residents gathered in the frigid cold outside the dilapidated building for a groundbreaking celebration to commemorate its redevelopment into a 161-unit apartment building.

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Among the guests were Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and several state commissioners, who all praised the local community, its leaders, and the public-private partnerships that are funding the \$62 million project.

First Selectman Christopher Kervick, a promoter of revitalization for the downtown Main Street area, introduced to the crowd a man who worked at the old mill for 50 years, and whose wife and parents also worked at the mill for a combined 97 years.

Kervick has often pointed to the town's early economic successes, particularly its once-thriving downtown, when speaking publicly about revitalization efforts. Standing in front of the 147-year-old former textile mill, which is now riddled with graffiti and broken windows, he said Friday that today's coordinated efforts with the state and other outside groups mirror the strategies that led to those successes.

“The ground we’re standing on is a result of a public-private partnership that occurred in 1825,” he said of the former tax exemption that bolstered the mills. “That little spark, that little public-private partnership that was provided led to all that, and now, here again, where the state has been very generous to the town of Windsor Locks in trying to provide that spark again.”

Malloy said the state’s role in the Windsor Locks downtown revitalization effort, which includes a new train station that will be a part of the planned Hartford Line commuter rail, shows a broader commitment to improving transportation across Connecticut.

“This is investing,” Malloy said. “It’s investing in communities, it’s investing in Connecticut, it’s investing in housing and transportation.”

Malloy also credited the local community and developer Beacon Communities LLC for its patience in waiting for the “layers upon layers upon layers of funding that had to be lined up” for the project.

Given that the site will have a number of subsidized units for low-income renters, Malloy said he was glad that “regular people can be assured of having a place in this building as well.”

Blumenthal also emphasized the team effort to make the building’s redevelopment a reality.

“This area is a region, and it is a region of communities that have committed to make it better, make it stronger, and make sure that everyone shares in making it better and stronger,” he said.

Touching on comments made by Kervick about the mill largely employing immigrants a century ago, Blumenthal said those former workers “would be very proud that Connecticut is not only revitalizing Main Street but also continuing to welcome immigrants who can contribute to this great nation.”

Transportation Department Commissioner James P. Redeker, Housing Department Commissioner Evonne M. Klein, and Department of Economic and Community Development Catherine Smith also spoke at the event, largely echoing the sentiments of Kervick, Malloy, and Blumenthal.

Smith said the efforts would ensure the Montgomery Mill is “revitalized in a way that will retain the historic characteristics of the building,” and also pointed out that a DECD grant would fund necessary removal of harmful chemicals from the building.

Tina Salvatore, a business owner whose cake shop sits directly across from the building, has been a vocal supporter of the proposed and ongoing changes to the area.

“I’m so excited to be part of the ground floor of this whole buildup, the revitalization,” she said Friday. “I can’t wait. This town’s going to be great. It really is.”

Beacon Communities LLC has said it expects the apartments to be available for lease in spring 2019.

