Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Forum
Julia Pemberton, First Selectwoman
April 8, 2021

Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Historic Mill Property
44+ Acre Brownfield Site Model for Smart Growth Transit Oriented Development
Guest Speakers

Brent Colley: First Selectman of Sharon, Connecticut
Author History of Redding website
Co-Town Historian and former resident

Sean Vroom: Director for Community Systems
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Technical Assistance to Brownfields Program (NJIT TAB)

Melissa Dulinski: Project Manager, NJIT TAB

Dave Hurley, LP, PG: Senior Manager of Brownfield Services
Langan Engineering & Environmental Services
Gilbert & Bennett: Brief History

- History of the Gilbert & Bennett Mfg. Co (G&B) dates to 1818
- The company was a leading manufacturer of wire mesh, screens and fencing products.
- The area we know as Georgetown was a vibrant multi-ethnic neighborhood populated by employees of the G&B Mfg. Co. and their families.
- In 1987, the Gilbert & Bennett buildings are added to the National Register of Historic Places.
- The Georgetown Historic District contains 144 buildings and sites, and the G&B factory as well as homes, schools and churches are included in the district.
- The Gilbert & Bennett Factory is a Brownfield regulated by the EPA and CT DEEP.

*The website [www.historyofredding.com](http://www.historyofredding.com) published by Brent Colley is a source of historic information contained on this slide.*
Wire Mill Closes, Redding Looks Forward

1989  The Georgetown G&B factory ceases production

800 manufacturing jobs are lost, the Town loses a significant source of tax revenue, tax liens begin to accrue

1999  Gilbert and Bennett receives bankruptcy protection and closes

2000  Looking to the future, the Board of Selectmen convenes a Master Plan Committee (BOF, BOS, Planning, Conservation, Zoning)

2002  Vision in hand, the town selects Georgetown Land Development to redevelop the property. GLDC purchases the tax liens.

2003  The Developer and the Town collaborate on a week-long charrette that results in a Master Plan for a mixed use, pedestrian friendly and environmentally responsible village center.
Redevelopment: A Plan Takes Shape

- The Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill is a Brownfield, contaminated by the byproducts of manufacturing.

- Virtually all development activity on the site is regulated by the EPA and CT DEEP.

- A Master Plan for the GLDC development is approved by the Zoning Commission in 2004.

- Permits are issued, work begins: Environmental Assessments, Demolition, Wastewater Treatment Expansion.
Master Plan: Circa 2005

The Approved Master Plan included

- 416 Units of mixed housing
- 375,000 SF Commercial, Retail & Civic Space
  - YMCA, Black Box Theater, Riverfront, Dining, etc.
- Restoration of the Georgetown train station
- 300 car Parking Garage
- Expanded Wastewater Treatment Plant ($10 million)
- Both the Master Plan and the Site Plan expired in 2018
Master Plan: Village District
Financing the Development: A Special Taxing District

Cost of the original development is estimated to be $300 mm

GLDC lobbies for a Special Taxing District as vehicle to issue bonds to fund the project

The Georgetown Special Taxing District (GSTD) is created by a Special Act of the State legislature in 2005

In 2006, the GSTD issues 14.45 million in bonds & borrows $5 million from the USDA to expand the sewer plant to serve the development

The Treasury Department authorizes $72mm in Green Bonds for the project

Million of dollars in owner financing, construction loans, bonds are invested in the property

Millions in Federal and State funding are awarded to the project
2008 Financial Crisis Stalls the Project

- The Financial crash of 2008 closes the capital markets
- Access to new investment dries up
- Developer defaults on debt obligations
- Stops paying taxes and sewer fees
- Tax liens begin to accumulate

When the Town files the foreclosure lawsuit in 2015, roughly 1.5 million in taxes and sewer fees is owed to Redding.
2008-2013 Project Flounders

- Repeated attempts by developer to bring in new investment are unsuccessful
- Developer seeks a buyer for the property
- Despite interest, the deals never close
- Without a buyer and new financing, the historic Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill redevelopment project is now regarded as failed.
In 2015, after a year of mediation, the Town files for foreclosure.

Attempts to mediate a resolution continue

2017, the Superior Court rules in favor of the Town.

An appeal by the developer takes the case to the CT Supreme Court

The CT Supreme Court decision is handed down in June of 2020 upholding the lower courts decision

On February 16, 2021 the Town of Redding takes title to the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill property, specifically the 44 acres comprising the historic core and the housing district to the west of the factory pond.
What comes next?

The town has long recognized that redevelopment of the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill is of critical importance to the long-term welfare of the town.

A successful redevelopment will provide a broadened tax base, a diversity of housing options, a walkable downtown, grand list growth, and more.

Due to remaining issues with the bondholders, the property cannot be developed for taxable purposes at present.

The Town’s interest now is in continuing to remediate the property to prepare for redevelopment.

How does a small town like Redding approach the redevelopment of a Brownfield Site? (Speakers Sean Vroom & Melissa Dulinski from NJIT TAB and Dave Hurley, LP, PG, Langan Engineering and Environmental)
What Comes Next: 2021-23

Financing: State & Federal Grants

Environmental Assessment

Planning:

Community Engagement, Charette

Remediation: River Walls

Infrastructure: Intersection at Bruce Bennett Nissan – Railroad Grade Crossing