

Cultural centre grist for those trying to save old mill

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It's currently a dilapidated old flour mill, rich with Unionville history but battered by years of non use.

But some residents see Stiver Mill as a perfect opportunity to save a heritage building, while creating new space for the community to use.

On Monday, Bob Stiver, a descendent of the owners of the mill, presented his vision - the Stiver Mill Cultural Centre - for the old building to the Unionville Villagers Association, Unionville Councillor Joe Virgilio and Mayor Frank Scarpitti.

The association is behind Mr. Stiver on the restoration of the mill, which sits on Station Lane, off of Main Street Unionville, beside the Unionville Train Station Community Centre.

The preliminary plans, worked on pro bono by architect David Johnston and David Tipler, of Banerjee and Associates structural engineer consultants, proposed the mill be turned into a community room, mini-museum and mill showcase.

The mill is sound and would make a good conservation project, Mr. Stiver said.

It's estimated the mill was built around 1916.

"It's showing its age," he said. "It's definitely in need of a facelift."

And it's messy - Mr. Stiver said it's estimated that it will need a \$40,000 or so cleaning job.

"There's no trying to kid anyone here. There's some work to be done, especially in the basement area," he said.

Mr. Stiver broke down his vision for the mill into three phases, only the first of which he is including in his immediate proposal.

The first step would include a refurbishment of the building and grounds, he said.

A farmer's market is also part of this phase, Mr. Stiver said.

The interior will include a meeting/community area, which Mr. Johnson said would easily fit 100, maybe 150.

The elevator/silo area would be kept in its original state, with a mini-museum being created on the main floor.

A lot of the machinery is still in the building, Mr. Stiver said, adding there are no plans to move the equipment, since it adds character to the building.

"I think they are going to be a big part of this atmosphere," he said.

Phase two, which Mr. Stiver said "is just for someone else down the road" could be building out at the back of the mill. Phase three, he said, could include something like a coffee or tea shop.

A couple of audience members, whose property is very near the proposed farmer's market expressed concern about the smells, noise and parking.

"We're just putting that out there tonight to give you some ideas," Mr. Stiver said.

The plan came about after the town, which has owned the mill since 1993, put out a request for proposals for the adaptive re-use of the mill.

Mr. Stiver was the only respondent.

The group working with him on his idea will now have to put together a proposal,

including a business plan, and submit it to the town.

Mr. Johnson said the current estimated cost is \$750,000.

"I'm just going off the top of my head...But I think \$750,000 would probably be on the low side," said Mr. Scarpitti, who noted the presentation was "very high level".

He said he would be very interested to see more detailed information, as it becomes ready.

"Again, it would all depend on the cost, the ultimate use and who would be partners on the project," he said.

The mayor was asked what will happen to the building should Mr. Stiver's proposal be turned down by the town.

"It's still the town's desire to see some kind of arrangement to see that building restored," Mr. Scarpitti said. "We see it as a very valuable heritage asset ... It's just a question of finding the right proposal ... I think we need something that is innovative and creative and I think this is a very good start."

Previously, there was a proposal to turn the mill into a medical building that was turned down after it proved to be unpopular with local residents. Community anger spurred creation of the Unionville Villagers Association.