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POKO Partners Gets Nod From City On Capehart Mill

Norwich — *After a late-night, closed-door discussion, the City Council agreed Tuesday to turn over the city's growing tax lien on the decaying Capehart Mill property to a New York developer interested in converting the mill into apartments and condominiums.*

Capehart is the city's highest delinquent tax property, with \$562,000 owed in taxes and interest, plus liens that bring the total to nearly \$600,000.

Extensive environmental contamination and the cost to clean up the dilapidated mill are the main concerns for POKO Partners LLC. The firm first approached the City Council last December, long before vandals broke into three transformers and caused an oil spill July 12 that is still leaking into the Shetucket River.

The resolution approved unanimously by the City Council late Tuesday authorizes Acting City Manager Joseph Ruffo to negotiate a letter of intent with Capehart Ventures LLC, the name POKO would use for the project.

Charles Duffy, business development consultant for the Robinson & Cole law firm representing POKO, said Tuesday the letter of intent would give the firm authority to research the property and conduct environmental studies to see if the project is feasible. POKO had proposed a \$60 million project to create about 250 condos and apartments at the Greenville mill using a combination of demolition and renovation.

Duffy said the spill complicated matters, potentially driving up the cost of the cleanup.

State Department of Environmental Protection officials also have located representatives of the defunct Foot of Fifth Inc., the firm listed as the owner of Capehart. An attorney representing the firm said last week that he is researching the situation as well.

Duffy said eventually POKO officials would have to contact the current owners.

Duffy said POKO is "confident enough" in the project to start spending money on environmental and feasibility studies. He hopes to have the letter of intent signed within the next three weeks.

The letter of intent would spell out timetables for making decisions about the project and for moving forward. Mayor Benjamin Lathrop said he hopes to have something concrete within a year. ■