

The revitalization of the old Franconia papermill in Lincoln into a hotel and resort received site plan approval last month. This conceptual image shows what the RiverWalk complex will look like.

COURTESY



Lincoln resort on mill site ready for construction phase

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LINCOLN — With site plan approval now in hand, the developer of a proposed resort hotel in place of the old paper mill in the center of town will continue demolition on the property and aims to begin construction in the spring of 2011.

The \$60 million, 170-unit resort complex will be called RiverWalk, and after working for three years with the state Department of Environmental Services and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, InnSeason Resorts received final site plan approval on Jan. 28.

"The new South Mountain resort area is now officially well underway as a key vacation



Demolition of this derelict structure in the mill complex is scheduled to begin soon.

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destination and an economic stimulus for the North Country region," said developer Dennis M. Ducharme, president of InnSeason Resorts, "and with the demolition of the former Franconia Papermill, the village of Lincoln is realizing the goal of economic revitalization that has eluded the area. This project means even more in today's economy, and we are proud that we have been able to continue to move this project

ahead despite the economic state of the country. We remain optimistic about the impact it will have on the local economy and the community."

Ducharme, who bought the former mill property five years ago, also developed the Pollard Brook resort in town in the 1990s.

RiverWalk will be a 170-unit mixed-use resort development, located on 25 acres and featuring luxury accommodations and amenities, including a 400-seat performing arts theater, conference center, outdoor four-season pool, a spa and wellness center, dining and retail shops. It will also accommodate the Papermill Theatre, which Ducharme said is an integral component of the resort.

The project is the latest evolution of Lincoln, which was built on the paper industry and later tourism with the development of the Loon Mountain ski area in the mid-1960s.

Franconia Paper closed down in the late 1970s and within the next decade, retail shops were developed on part of the property, while the rest of the unused structures had fallen into decay.

About 30 percent of the mill has been torn down, said InnSeasons spokesman Paul Kasianchuk, and plans now call for the demolition later this year of the old bleaching facility, a seven-story structure that he described as a "scar on the face of South Mountain."

Ducharme has received a \$900,000 low-interest loan as part of the EPA's Brownfield program. No date has been set for when the building will come down, but it will be by the end of the year, Kasianchuk said.

Despite the gloomy economic climate, Kasianchuk said, the developer is working with a broker to come up with a half dozen investment partnerships.

"The market is awful, but there is money out there," he said.

Meanwhile, the development is on track to see the demolition of the bleaching building this year, and site work beginning in the spring of 2010.