



Dennis Ducharme's vision of revitalizing downtown Lincoln calls for demolition of several old mill buildings to make way for shops, restaurants and a hotel, as shown in this artist's drawing. He would, however, recreate much of the facade of the old buildings in recognition of the history of the town.

As it ONCE was?

◆ **Mill owner** promises everything old will be new again.

By **LORNA COLQUHOUN**
Sunday New Correspondent

LINCOLN

WHEN THE OLD Franconia Paper Co. shut down more than 25 years ago, the engine driving the economy became tourism and outdoor recreation.

By the late 1970s, when the mill closed its doors, Loon Mountain had been hosting skiers for more than 15 years. Condominiums had sprung up, as well as retail shops, restaurants and lodging, some of which found homes in a couple of the old mill buildings that were revitalized, thereby keeping the town's landscape familiar and its history remembered.

Lincoln is continuing its evolution from mill town to resort community. Massachusetts developer Dennis Ducharme, who transformed an old hotel to a timeshare complex, bought the former mill two years ago for \$4.5 million and has been at work on his vision to turn it into a four-season resort.

Across the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River, Loon Mountain is gearing up for another expansion, to include a new lift and a 67-lot subdivision of high-end homes at the base of South Mountain.

The Millfront Marketplace has gotten a facelift over the past several years and he expects to have two or three more shops in place over the winter and "all full by next summer," Ducharme said.

The challenge now, he said last month while hosting Department of Environmental Services Commissioner

Michael Nolin, is to deal with the remaining mill buildings that cannot be saved.

Signs of age

On a tour of the old mills, Ducharme pointed out the collapsed roofs and the detritus of another age. Looming behind the marketplace is the 7-story bleaching mill. All the buildings must come down and Ducharme is working with the DES to draw up a plan to deal with the demolition.

"I don't know when it will start," Ducharme said. "It's a slow process."

He's on the board of directors of the North Country Center of the Arts, whose home for its Papermill Theater is old No. 1 Machine Room. That building must come down, too.

"The theater will run one more summer (in the old mill) and in 2007, it will have to go someplace else for a year or two," he said. "This building is not the

best in the world — we had to make some concrete fittings to shore it up" in the past season.

But even as Ducharme plans to take down the aging buildings, his vision is to rebuild in a way to preserve what once was. The new Papermill Theater will have the same roofline it has now.

"I have great affection for Lincoln and its history," said Ducharme, who has developed the Pollard Brook Resort for more than 15 years. "It's because of this that I want to see this as a focal point. Some of this has to be preserved. I want to try and preserve as much of the facade that I can."

Secondary role

In the two years since buying the old mill, he's become a keeper of some of the town's history.

"I've copied more than 300 black and

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LORNA COLQUHOUN

Plans call for the seven-story bleaching building, pictured, to come down to make way for a hotel.

Old mills slowly getting upgrades, new purpose

Mills

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white photos on to CDs," he said, adding that he also wants to have some kind of museum within

the new development for Lincoln's history.

Lincoln's ski industry is also gearing up for improvements. Loon Mountain has received permits to construct 67 single-family homes. Tim Beck, the ski area's vice president of planning, said officials are in the process of finding a development partner for the project.

About 10 years ago, Loon cut two trails on South Mountain and in 2007, officials expect to begin erecting a four-person detachable chairlift to service that side of the mountain. The result will be a new view from the downtown, reminiscent of the Snow King ski resort in Jackson, Wyo., which is located just blocks away from the downtown.

"Not many New England towns have done this where people can come in and see skiers coming almost right into town," Beck said. "This will

create a connection to the town."

Getting things done

In a nod to the multi-year process Loon went through to receive permits from the federal, state and local agencies, Nolin said he has made it a priority for his agency to deal with projects in a timely manner.

"(DES) understands that there are not just environmental implications, but economic significance as well" to development projects, he said. "The economy and the environment can move forward together."

Manchester's Fisher Cats minor league baseball stadium, he said, is an example of that. When the plans came together, he said he put together an "environmental SWAT team" to work on it, providing the developers with a single point of communication.

"It reduced the permitting time to less than a year and a half," he

said. "With the previous thinking, it would not have gone forward; there would not be a new stadium without this kind of thinking. We're focused on pushing ahead."



Dennis Ducharme has big plans for the crumbling mills.