



VANDEWALLE & ASSOCIATES INC.

To: Common Council, City of Wisconsin Rapids
Plan Commission, City of Wisconsin Rapids
Recovery and Reuse Project Steering Committee

From: Scott Harrington, AICP, Principal Planner
Sonja Kruesel, AICP, Associate Planner

Date: June 29, 2022

Re: Recovery and Reuse Plan Progress Report

Vandewalle & Associates and a sub-consultant team have contracted with the City of Wisconsin Rapids to develop a Recovery and Reuse Plan and Implementation Strategy in response to the idling of the Verso Papermill. This memo provides a status update as project work continues to progress, and supplements previous reports submitted.

Task Updates

- “Forest Industries of the Future” industry symposium coordination. Together with sub-consultant Eric Singaas at NRRI (Natural Resources Research Institute), detailed planning of invitees, symposium format, and coordination of industry speakers is in progress. The purpose of the event will be to highlight research and innovative products in the forest industry and to discuss pathways to implementation. Results from this conversation are expected to help identify potential economic opportunities as examples for implementation in Wisconsin Rapids and the Central Wisconsin region.

After initial scheduling challenges, the planned roster of speakers has been adjusted slightly and a date has been selected. The event will occur **Thursday July 21, 2022, at 2:00 pm via Zoom**. Invites will be extended to a broad group of industry, legislative, and economic development leaders. All Plan Commission and Common Council members will receive an invitation.

- Input sessions were held with the Plan Commission and Common Council, as well as the public. Events occurred on May 10, 2022, and June 1, 2022, respectively. Attendees heard a presentation from the planning consultant and engaged in an exercise to identify individual and group priorities. Through a sticky-dot voting system, the meetings concluded by identifying the top priorities of the group regarding mill’s future. These priorities will be incorporated into visioning and reuse or redevelopment scenarios for the mill. At the public meeting, participants were also asked to share a favorite memory or identify any sense of loss due to the mill’s closure.
- The same input questions from the above exercises will be posted on the City Website [link: <https://www.wirapids.org/recovery-and-redevelopment-plan.html>]. Members of the public are

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encouraged to share their responses online. We are working with city staff and the steering committee to advertise the availability of this input opportunity. For example, we expect the website and survey availability to be noticed on the city's social media sites, and the Chamber plans to share it in their member correspondence.

- The sale of the property to Billerud Corporation was finalized in March 2022. Vandewalle & Associates has continued its efforts to engage with the purchaser, to obtain additional feedback regarding the future of the property. Billerud has noted willingness to discuss but has not yet provided additional information. For example, we have not received specific information on how long the converting facility (building adjacent to the river in the middle of the site) will continue to run. The converting facility operates to provide sheeting services for one of the acquired mills in the Upper Peninsula. As long as this mill continues production of sheeted paper or printed products, a conversion facility will be necessary whether that is at the Rapids site or at another location. Billerud has recently filled approximately 25 additional positions at the Rapids site to meet this demand. Total employment at the conversion facility is around 150 people.
- Completed initial report on workforce data and supply chain analysis and impacts. Findings from these reports will be summarized in the upcoming events and public work sessions listed above.
- Completing detailed inventory of structures on the Rapids site and analyzing reuse potential.
- We initially anticipated completing the Economic Recovery study first (by early spring) followed by the Site Reuse Plan (early summer), but delays in coordinating with others for both portions have caused us to complete these together rather than separately. As a result, we should have drafts of both to share late summer/early fall.