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## Plainwell wins \$1 million from state for paper-mill redevelopment project

By Sharon Sturdevant | Special to the Kalam...

December 17, 2009, 6:20AM



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File photo of the Plainwell Paper Co. Mill site. An area to the right is the former office building for the mill.

**PLAINWELL** — Wrecking crews may finally start demolishing parts of Plainwell’s vacant paper-mill complex later next year if city officials keep getting good news about funding.

They learned Wednesday that an application for \$1 million in Community Development Block Grant funds was approved by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

“I really think we could see a wrecking ball on the mill site by next fall,” City Manager Erik Wilson said. “This grant won’t fund the entire demolition process, but it will cover a significant portion of the costs.”

Initial estimates indicate it might cost the city upwards of \$2 million to “selectively demolish parts of the mill that can’t be redeveloped,” Wilson said, but that figure could change as existing conditions and the scope of work are better defined.

The city has several applications for grants and low-interest loans pending with various agencies that would help fund environmental remediation, demolition and other work needed to redevelop the 36-acre parcel vacant since Plainwell Paper Inc. declared bankruptcy in November 2000.

“The city is actually in a good competitive position to win more grants and low-interest loans since we have a potential development partner already identified,” Wilson said.

City leaders do not intend to demolish historic brick buildings tucked within the mill complex.



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File photo of the Plainwell Paper Co. Mill site. In this photo you see the interior of one of the old production areas of the mill.

The city early this year sought proposals from developers willing to help redevelop the parcel to accommodate a mixture of commercial and residential uses. An international firm, Conestoga-Rovers Association, emerged as the leading candidate.

City officials began negotiations with CRA in June to establish a development agreement that will define timetables for environmental cleanup, demolition of unwanted buildings and site redevelopment plans.

It will also establish occupancy plans, terms for economic development incentives, guidelines to keep part of the property open to the public and terms for financial responsibility.

Both sides agreed Dec. 4 to extend negotiations another 60 days to hammer out specific technical and legal language, Wilson said.

"The negotiations now are not about huge substantive issues about what the project looks like," Wilson said. "We are focused now on the technical points of how those plans play out."

The city manager said the \$1 million MEDC grant was approved to help demolish vacant mill structures that are considered a blight and nuisance that that may attract children. Minors have broken into sections of the complex and vandalized the structures at least six times in the past three years.

"This is another little victory for our city as we work to turn that property back into something valuable for this community," Wilson said of the state grant.

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