

Hawley Sets Hearings for Silk Mill Project

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Hawley, Pa. - Hawley Council has set the hearings for the proposed development of the former Castle Antiques building and the possible closure of Welwood Avenue. At the regular meeting, Council set the hearings for Thursday, Oct. 1 beginning at 6 p.m. in the Hawley Firehouse on Columbus Avenue. Two hearings will be held that night — one of the Conditional Use request and the other on the proposed ordinance to close Welwood Avenue. The Borough Planning Commission will hold a special meeting Tuesday, Sept. 23 to review changes made to the plans to address concerns raise by the Commission.

The radius on the turns on the internal roads was changed to allow for better access by emergency equipment. Hawley Silk Mill LLC plans to develop the former antique warehouse/silk mill into a mixed commercial use building, with an open market and museum on one floor, office space on the next one up, a college on the top floor and possibly a restaurant on bottom floor. One of the problems is that the building lacks enough parking. Developers want to close Welwood and the part of Belmont in front of the building and are working to get back PennDOT right of ways to allow them to construct 160 parking spaces, enough to get a variance from the Borough's ordinance requirement. Welwood would be closed from Route 6 to just above a warehouse on the lower end of the property. Belmont would be used as the entrance, while the lower end of Welwood would be gated for emergency access. The upper end by Route 6 would be totally closed. Developers said the closure would be key to drawing the colleges, of which two are showing a lot of interest according to Hawley Silkmill partner and Attorney Anthony Waldron.

Developers have said colleges would not be interested in the building if students had to cross Welwood as it exists today. Council and Waldron discussed the requirements needed to close a road. Waldron said Hawley Silk Mill would take care of the notifications needed. Hawley Silk Mill is the only property owner directly affected by the closure, i.e., they own all the property within the area of both roads, which would be closed if approved. Waldron said other property owners on Welwood below the closure have provided letters supporting the proposal. Waldron said that without the closures, he didn't think they would be able to fully develop the property, as they would like. He estimates there would only be 70-80 spaces available for parking. Currently there are only about 30. Waldron noted when the building was operating as a silk mill, workers parked where ever they could including along Route 6. He said they could build a bridge over the road for pedestrian access, but that was costly around a \$1 million for engineering and construction.

A parking garage would also be costly. Bernathy noted that if the ordinance to close the roads passes, residents would have 40 days after the hearing to appeal the ordinance. They could also seek compensation for damages the closure may cause them, but he said he thought few would meet the standards to collect anything. Waldron noted Lackawanna

College seems to be very interested in opening a campus in the building. He said Johnson College was also interested. He noted those colleges currently worked together sharing some classes and Wallenpaupack Area High School offers courses which would allow students to jump into programs from the colleges.

Meanwhile, residents can attend the public information session being held by Hawley Silk Mill LLC. The group held the session during the month of September for anyone wishes to learn more about the proposals before the hearings. The last session is set for Thursday, September 24 from 5 to 7 pm at the Silk Mill building on Welwood Avenue. Hawley Borough Council meets 7 p.m. the second Wednesday of each month in Borough Hall.