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Buyer sees new life for tannery

Plans for Water St. site include housing, restaurants, shops

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The former Gallun tannery, overlooking the Milwaukee River north of downtown, is being sold to a Denver firm that specializes in redeveloping former industrial properties into housing and other new uses.

Tanesay Development LLC has agreed to buy the property, which covers nearly 6 acres along the west side of N. Water St., north of E. Pearson St. The firm has until May 2008 to complete its purchase, said Mark Geall, a Tanesay principal.

Tanesay is working with Engberg Anderson Design Partnership Inc. to create a plan for the site, Geall said Monday. He said it will likely be a mix of housing, restaurants, shops and office space.

The development, which Tanesay has named Gallun Gardens, will attempt to use the existing former tannery buildings, Geall said. But redeveloping those structures, which would include making them energy efficient, might prove to be unfeasible, he said.

A portion of the complex was razed about two years ago.

Tanesay also will design the development to provide public access to the river, including the possible extension of Cass and Hamilton streets across Water St., Geall said.

Geall said he didn't know how many housing units the site might accommodate. He wants Gallun Gardens to include a lot of green space.

Tentative plans from 2004 called for 250 to 300 condominiums on the site. Those plans were floated by another development firm and were disclosed by Siegel-Gallagher Inc., the site's property manager. The development firm at that time was not identified.

More recently, Tanesay became aware of the Gallun property through Mark Ernst, an Engberg Anderson partner who's working on a Tanesay project in Appleton.

The Appleton project, known as RiverHeath, was announced in May. Tanesay plans to develop housing, shops and offices on a 15-acre former paper mill site along the Fox River. RiverHeath's first phase calls for 75 to 80 condos and 40,000 square feet of retail space, Geall said.

Wisconsin native

Geall grew up in Appleton and Neenah. He was a lawyer at the Environmental Protection Agency's Chicago office for seven years, where he worked on the cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated sites.

After leaving the EPA, Geall worked for Brownfield Capital, a private equity firm in Denver that provides funding for the redevelopment of contaminated sites. He and partner Andrew Bermingham launched Tanesay nine months ago.

The former A.F. Gallun & Sons Co. tannery complex, which is owned by the Gallun family, shut down in 1993. The tannery's former offices, at 1818 N. Water St., were developed into 31 apartments. Those apartments were upgraded and converted to condos in 2005.

The former tannery buildings, which are across Water St. from the former tannery office, have been a dead spot within an otherwise hot development area.

New Land Enterprises has developed condos north of the former tannery, including the 117-unit Riverbridge, 1915 N. Water St., and the 53-unit Highbridge, 1888 N. Water St.

Also, the old Five and Ten Tavern building, 1850 N. Water St., was sold this year to an investors group led by Cliff McDonald, who operates Brocach, an Irish pub and restaurant in Madison. McDonald plans to open a Brocach restaurant at the Water St. building by late summer.

Nearby restaurants that have opened within the year include Good Life, a Caribbean restaurant, 1935 N. Water St.; and Bayou, a Cajun restaurant, 2060 N. Humboldt Ave.

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