

[Excerpted with permission.]



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## Two sisters plan ambitious mixed-use redevelopment of Collins Co. ax factory site

By Andrew Larson

A new plan to redevelop the Collins Co. ax factory in Canton features a mix of housing, retail, industrial and community space, with a focus on preserving the site's historical character while adapting the property for reuse.

The village of Collinsville, a section of Canton, was built around the ax factory, which sits along the Farmington River at 10 Depot Road. It once *produced* axes, machetes and steel-edged tools.

Now, the property sits underused, with just a handful of tenants, including an antiques shop, hair salon and spring factory. Parts of the building have been condemned, don't meet current building code or are inaccessible.

Sisters Lisa and Merritt Tilney have formed Collinsville Redevelopment Co., which submitted its first plans for the project to the Inland Wetland Commission on Thursday. They say the project will benefit the community by reactivating unused portions of the site and unlocking views of the river, while preserving the property's historical and cultural significance.

"It is such a gem, and I think now is the time that we need to start cleaning up the site and get going so that we can ensure the buildings remain intact for the next 140 years," Merritt Tilney said in a recent interview with the Hartford Business Journal.

Lisa and Merritt are daughters of property owner Rusty Tilney, who bought the site in 2002 with the goal of revitalizing it. Recently, his health has declined and they are taking the reins.

The project requires approvals from various entities, including the State Historic Preservation Office, as the property sits on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Tilneys say they have a pre-development team in place including a soil scientist, multiple engineers, landscape architect, several consultants and a law firm.

Remediation work could begin in 2026 and is expected to take 14 to 18 months. Construction would take another six to eight years, they said.

The project would occur in phases, with the goal of keeping current tenants for as long as possible. Of the 28 buildings, 24 would be redeveloped. Four would be demolished.

Three new multifamily buildings would contain roughly 224 apartments and 48 condominiums. Also, the oldest building on the property, the Granite Building, would be converted into 16 condominiums.

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There would also be a mix of retail, offices, light commercial, and possibly food and beverage establishments throughout the rest of the site.

The Tilney sisters grew up in nearby Bloomfield and are both Yale graduates.

Lisa Tilney has a background in architecture and has worked for firms in New York City and Berlin, Germany. She has also worked as a site manager and began her career on Wall Street working for a hedge fund.

Merritt Tilney runs AMT Coaching, a leadership advisory consultancy that she founded. She also has experience as a management consultant at Booz-Allen & Hamilton, as well as ETRADE, Citigroup, Gap and several startups.