

**Public Comments re Brownfield Multipurpose, Assessment, RLF, and Cleanup (MARC) grant
application for the Curtis Fine Papers mill, Adams, Massachusetts, 1-26-2026**
Caroline Scully, Adams' resident, Master's Environmental Studies

Introduction:

We respectfully request that the Town of Adams consider alternatives to the three options proposed by Weston & Sampson in the Draft Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives (ABC) for the former Curtis Paper Mill at 115 Howland Avenue in Adams, Massachusetts. While we appreciate the work of Weston & Sampson in evaluating the buildings and hazardous building materials on the site, we believe that the unique features of the buildings may have been overlooked. We believe that a full understanding of the remarkable and unusual features of the buildings would support preservation of more of the structures, open up possibilities for reuse, and attract future buyers. In particular, the amazing, tiled paper-making vats in building 3 and the huge expanse of building 4 are irreplaceable.

We are also concerned about the local and wider environmental impact of demolition. We ask that the neighborhood around the site and the wider community be included in discussions of the best way to clean up the site.

Unique and historic building features:

Building 3 contains huge multi-story tiled-vats once used for papermaking. They are unlike anything built today and represent the craftsmanship upon which Adams was built. Building 4 is very large and has a concrete slab floor that could be used for a roller-skating arena or other recreation. Most of this building is intact. Much like the Hoosac Coal and Grain buildings, also in Adams, perhaps these are worth preserving. In front of building 3 is a pool of water apparently fed by the aquifer below. Curtis Paper employees, some of whom are still local, were proud of the clear clean water used to make the paper.

Release of hazardous materials into the neighborhood with demolition:

The draft grant narrative section “Community Engagement, Section g. Incorporating Community Input”, says there will be regular public meetings and “...opportunities for public input and two-way communication to ensure the proposed cleanup activities are conducted in a manner that is protective of sensitive populations and nearby residents.” We believe it is important to consider the release of hazardous materials inherent with demolition of the buildings rather than encapsulation of these materials. Dust and particulate matter will impact air quality for the neighborhood. The Hoosic River could be polluted by runoff.

Lead paint, asbestos, and other hazardous materials are present in most old buildings, including many houses in Adams and probably in the soils yet we do not tear down all old buildings. Perhaps there could be more consideration of alternatives to demolition of buildings 1, 2, 3, and 4, as presented in Alternative #3 to avoid the potentially dangerous release of contaminated dust that might occur if they are demolished.

The Project Goal (page 4, section III) of the ABCA states that “Severe deterioration has compromised the structural integrity of the onsite buildings & has prevented access to potentially impacted soils beneath the building footprints that may require remediation...” Surely, the slabs beneath the buildings have protected the soil from contamination. Would it not be better to leave the soil underneath the buildings undisturbed? This would avoid possible runoff-contamination of the Hoosic river.

Potential reuse options:

We believe that the site will be much more interesting to potential buyers if some of the larger buildings remain, as long as the hazardous materials are removed or encapsulated. Potential buyers may want to incorporate the unique historic buildings into their site plan. We understand that the Town believes potential buyers might prefer to build an industrial building on a bare site. Does Adams really need another industrial building along this stretch of Route 8/Howland Ave that is already almost entirely industrial? This will not improve the appearance or character of this northern entrance into Adams. The neighbors in this economically-impooverished area might appreciate more creative uses of the site, including housing, recreation, or art. The location of this lot and beautiful views of Mount Greylock from the grounds suggest that this land could be repurposed for something more than an industrial park. The sheer size and length of building 4 suggests reuse. The town is desperately in need of indoor recreation. Could this building be a solution? Would the site make a great artist workspace similar to Greylock Works or the Eclipse Mill? Is there a private group that could create an indoor soccer space much like one in Canaan, NY. Right now, our local soccer players drive all the way to Canaan for weekly practices. We hope that there can be some flexibility that will allow for neighborhood and community input.

Budget:

We feel that the budget could be reevaluated. The costs shown in the ABCA and draft grant narrative do not take into consideration the value of the existing buildings and how special they are. The costs do not include the environmental costs of burying the demolished buildings and hazardous waste in a landfill. The carbon output of the onsite demolition and transportation of the materials to a disposal site are not considered. In truth, tearing down large buildings often causes more environmental damage than preserving them.

Conclusion:

We ask that the town remain flexible about how to best remediate the Curtis Paper Mill site. Current trends in managing old buildings include discussions of demolition vs. deconstruction vs. reuse. We hope Adams will further evaluate the unique and historic features of the buildings and consider repairing some of the buildings and encapsulation of the hazardous building materials. Like the demolition of Penn Station in New York City in 1963, might we regret destroying our history?

We ask that the neighborhood and wider community have the opportunity to weigh in.

Thank you for your consideration.