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WALTHAM

The Boston Globe

Factory to anchor condos

Would require zoning variances

By **Stephanie V. Siek, Globe Staff** | August 5, 2007

WALTHAM -- It takes a lot of imagination to look past the weedy yard, broken and boarded windows, and overall decrepitude of 74 Rumford Ave. and envision an upscale condominium development with river views, but that is just what one developer is taking steps to create on the site.

Norumbega/Oaktree LLC wants to preserve the historic 19th-century frame of the former factory building and turn it into three housing units. A new matching brick building would hold another 31 units with common areas and a parking garage. Three of the condominiums would be designated as affordably priced units. The new development would be called the Island Residences at Cram's Cove.

At a hearing scheduled for Tuesday, the Zoning Board of Appeals will consider whether Norumbega/Oaktree should get renewed permission to build with slight variances from what zoning law requires for setbacks, driveway openings, and the size of backyards and front yards. The company first applied in 2004 and the permission must be renewed yearly.

The current Riverfront Overlay District zoning requires a minimum front yard of 10 feet, but the existing front yard of the building the company wants to preserve is 5 feet, 5 inches. The rear yard would be about 2.5 feet less than required, and the setback from the Charles River would be 20.5 feet instead of the required 50 feet.

The building at 74 Rumford once housed the O'Hara Waltham Dial Co., which shipped intricately decorated watch dials all over the world. More than a century old, the dial company building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. More recently, it was home to a canvas factory.

Norumbega/Oaktree manager Arthur Harrison said the company is hoping to sell most of the market-rate units for between \$450,000

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and \$500,000. If the permitting is approved, work on the site could begin as early as October, with completion in fall of next year.

The Island Residences will not be the only residential reimagining of a historic industrial building in the neighborhood. On nearby Crescent Street, another developer is preparing the first phase of work on the former Waltham Watch factory complex.

Watch City LLC, a venture of Berkeley Investments Inc. and First Republic Corp. of America, plans to begin building 177,000 square feet of office space, including a 9,000-square-foot restaurant, in the 22 interconnected buildings in November. The project's second phase, which will require a special permit from the City Council, is to build 95 loft-style apartments and a cafe. Project manager Eric Ekman said later phases will add 100,000 square feet to the complex.

The Zoning Board of Appeals public hearing for 74 Rumford Ave. is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Government Center at 119 School St.

Stephanie V. Siek can be reached at ssiek@globe.com. ■

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