

Sykesville Working to Reclaim Ownership of 12 Historic Buildings in Warfield Development

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Sykesville is taking steps to reclaim ownership of 12 historic buildings in Warfield at Historic Sykesville, a mixed-use housing and commercial development on Route 32.

Sykesville Town Manager Joe Cosentini stated in a May 11 news release that the town is working to reclaim the 12 historic structures at Warfield because the developer, Warfield Companies, has made “little or no progress” in restoring the buildings, which it had agreed to do when the property was purchased in 2018.

Of the 12 buildings, three were restored before the 2018 sale.

“The sales agreement from 2018 included a reversion clause,” Cosentini said. “This was included in case the owners didn’t restore the structures or make reasonable attempts to have them restored. Spending benchmarks were outlined in the agreement of dollars to be spent from the escrow accounts that were established from the proceeds at closing. The first benchmark was in June 2021 (the three year anniversary of closing) which required \$525,000 be spent on preservation/restoration efforts. According to our records, roughly \$150,000 has been spent on preservation/restoration.”

The town also contends that as part of the sales contract, Warfield Companies has yet to deposit \$1 million of the \$8 million they spent to purchase the property, into an escrow account to be used for the preservation and restoration of the buildings.

As part of the sales contract, \$1 million of the sales price was deferred until the two-year anniversary from the closing date in 2018, Cosentini said. This would have been in June 2020.

“The Town has been given no indication that the owners intend to resolve these ongoing issues,” the news release states. “This inaction leaves the Town with two options: continue watching the buildings be demolished by neglect until they can no longer be saved or exercise the remedies available to the Town from the original sales contract, including reversion of the historic buildings to the Town’s ownership. The Town has chosen the latter.”

Finally, the town intends to use existing escrow funding of \$1.2 million set aside at closing to begin securing the structures and preventing further deterioration.

Timothy F. Maloney, attorney for Warfield, said in response to Sykesville’s actions, that the town owned the property for nearly two decades, and made “little progress” in restoring the historic buildings, or creating a viable economic development project. Maloney claims this new action will jeopardize approximately \$20 million in state financial commitments to the project.

Maloney said since 2018, despite the COVID pandemic, Warfield Companies has spent “millions of dollars” in physical improvements to the property and to develop thoughtful, realistic proposals that meet the state’s affordable housing goals.

“Warfield Companies remains committed to advancing the Warfield project per the original disposition agreement,” he said. “The idea that it would walk away from years of effort and millions of dollars of investment is outrageous. The developer intends to press forward in collaboration with the State of Maryland. It will vigorously defend the project from the town’s defamatory attacks and any attempts to wrest control of the project from the developer.”

Warfield at Historic Sykesville is a mixed-use project zoned for up to 600,000 square feet of office, light industrial and retail space, approximately 181 residential units, and a 27-acre town park, according to its website, <https://www.historicwarfield.com/>.

Maloney has said 170 to 180 rental units are proposed for one of the historic buildings, with different price points.

The three historic buildings on the property that have been restored are occupied by Nexion Health, Zeteo Tech and Alderson Loop.

The Warfield property has a **long history**, once housing thousands of patients.

The property was home to Springfield State Hospital, the second mental hospital in Maryland. The site boasted a number of medical and mental health care professionals. It also provided access to care for patients in Central and Western Maryland. Since the estate was well watered by springs, it also provided irrigation to farms and orchards, helping the hospital to provide much of its own food while giving patients work therapy.

“Sykesville is a small town but we have a rich history,” Mayor Stacy Link stated in an email. “And without Springfield State Hospital, ‘Maryland’s second hospital for the insane,’ there is no Sykesville.”

Link said the reversion agreement included in the 2018 contract is how the town can save these historic buildings from further deterioration.

“It is the ‘reversion agreement’ that safeguards these buildings and affords this small town the opportunity to preserve its rich history,” she said. “Now is the time to do this. It simply cannot wait any longer. The buildings have reached a tipping point. And if we don’t act now and take advantage of the protections set forth in our sales agreement, it will be too late and our history will be lost for good.”

Link said requiring Warfield Companies to invest \$525,000 to stabilize the historic buildings was not too much to ask.

“But it’s been four years and the current owners have missed that mark,” she said. “Like haven’t even pulled the arrow from their quiver. You don’t have to be a professional preservationist to see the results of that neglect. It is unfortunate that we have to do this. But we are grateful for having been given the tools to do so.”

The town contends that the residents of Sykesville want to see the buildings preserved.

“As the public has consistently expressed their desire for these buildings to be saved so that they can once again serve as a community amenity, the Mayor and Town Council have made this decision unanimously,” the town’s news release states. “The Town does not anticipate any of these steps to be quick or easy. Our goal is to maintain an open outlook on potential future uses as we work with public and private partners to ensure progress is made to achieve the ends our community deserves.”

Ongoing conflict

This is not the first time the town and Warfield Companies have been at odds.

In December 2021, Warfield Companies filed a zoning text amendment with the town to construct less commercial space and instead build affordable housing.

The request was referred to the Sykesville Planning Commission, which held two meetings, one on Feb. 7, 2022, and another on March 21, 2022. The planning commission ultimately recommended denial of the application. On June 21, the council voted unanimously to deny Warfield’s application.

On July 22, lawyers for Warfield Companies and the Maryland Building Industry Association filed a complaint with the Open Meetings Compliance Board. Warfield argued that there were two separate conversations that occurred simultaneously at each of the meetings, “the public dialogue,” and a “simultaneous private conversation” among members of the planning commission, the Town Council, and the mayor.