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## Austell Hopes to 'Breathe New Life' Into Former Mill

By Jake Busch [jbusch@mdjonline.com](mailto:jbusch@mdjonline.com)

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Austell Mayor Ollie Clemons wants to “breathe new life” into the Threadmill Complex by partnering with a developer to make it a mixed-use, “live, work, play” development.

Jake Busch

**AUSTELL** — In 1932, Scottish textile manufacturer Coats & Clark Thread Company built Clarkdale, a planned community to support the company’s nearby mill.

The mill, owned by the city of Austell since it purchased the property in 2001, is known as the Threadmill Complex, sitting on 25 acres on Austell Powder Springs Road in the historic Clarkdale area.

Austell is looking to redevelop the three-story, 230,000-square-foot complex into a mixed-use development with housing, shops and restaurants, park space and offices.

“In essence, we are getting back to our roots,” Mayor Ollie Clemons told the MDJ. “While mixed use is the trend today, that was exactly the type of environment created years ago in these planned mill communities. You worked at the mill, had a home in walking distance, all the recreation you could want with a swimming pool, recreation center, even fishing ponds — a true live, work, play environment.”

The complex now houses some businesses, retailers and city departments such as the mayor’s office, police and community affairs.

The city is open to a public-private partnership, sale of the property or a combination of the two, per Clemons.

## Ball rolling on redevelopment

The city issued a request for proposals on Sept. 5 and held a pre-proposal conference with “great developer turnout” on Sept. 20, according Clemons. Responses to the request are due by Wednesday.

Austell envisions redevelopment of the Threadmill Complex complementing other redevelopment efforts in the city, including downtown redevelopment.

It is also expecting any update to the Threadmill Complex “to preserve and promote the significance of the Threadmill Complex and Clarkdale Historic District,” the latter being a subdivision adjacent the complex, Clemons said.

Notably, Austell wants developers to present plans that include a mix of housing options affordable for young professionals, families and seniors looking to age in place.

Derek Caffè, a real estate broker and housing developer, runs the advocacy group Create Austell, which seeks to influence the city's future development.

Caffè is in support of the redevelopment of the Threadmill Complex, noting the potential of the property is something he's thought about since moving to the city in 2015.

At the time, he was reading about Ponce City Market and the Beltline in Atlanta and, seeing people walk up and down Austell Powder Springs Street — he lived in a duplex in Clarkdale Mill Village, right by the complex — he saw the potential for the area.

“I'm thinking, we're between two downtowns (Austell and Powder Springs), wouldn't this be great if there was a path and then the Threadmill (Complex) was developed,” Caffè.

These ideas spurred Caffè to action, as he is heavily involved with the trajectory of the city's development.

Caffè worked on the 2017 and 2022 Austell comprehensive plans. He also worked on the city's Livable Centers Initiative study, which looks to enhance the downtown and surrounding areas, including the Threadmill Complex, while staying true to Austell's historic character.

While Caffè started pondering the possibilities for the complex in 2015, he's glad there is now movement toward real progress with the site.

## Housing brings business

Clemons said the Threadmill Complex is part of a food desert, an area “with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities,” according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

That designation speaks to “a need for commercial businesses with affordable produce,” Clemons said.

While Caffè said he would like to see more grocery options in the area, he noted that’s unlikely to happen without more housing options, and the complex first becoming a “self-sustaining economic engine.”

The city of Austell has the smallest amount of multi-family housing of any other part of Cobb, Caffè said, but also boasts the lowest housing prices in the county.

“I’m for there being a grocery, but you basically don’t want to put the cart before the horse,” Caffè said. “It’s really getting up those residential units that can allow us to approach businesses such as grocery stores and other amenities that people want to see.”

Once that housing is built, businesses will see the viability of moving into the area, Caffè added. Clemons said the city is excited to collaborate with a developer to turn the complex into a multi-use, “live, work, play” site.

## ‘Vibrant, multifunctional community hub’

Caffè thinks turning the Threadmill Complex into that type of development is viable and needed in the area.

For example, it could open the door to new connections with different parts of Austell and Cobb, such as linking up with the planned Austell-Powder Springs Trail.

“I think those two in unison becomes a knockout for the area, along with private investment that’s already happening in the city,” Caffè said.

The city, which also pointed to the opportunity to connect with the trail, added that it could also offer improved access to CobbLinc bus routes.

Caffe also noted that the redeveloped complex could become one of the nodes in the area of Paulding, Cobb, and Douglas counties, increasingly popular for its cheaper housing and expanding amenities compared to other parts of the metro area.

To Clemons and city officials, a revamped Threadmill Complex would revitalize a part of Austell and make it the happening place people like Caffe see it becoming.

“The goal is to breathe new life into the area and make it a vibrant, multifunctional community hub,” Clemons said.