

E/N Properties, Westrock bid on American Fabrics complex

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BRIDGEPORT — Two developers that already have ties in the city are fighting for the right to turn the old American Fabrics building on Central Avenue into an artist and industrial haven.

E/N Properties and Westrock Development LLC put bids in Friday to buy the five-acre site, and its mix of brick and wooden buildings that used to be home to cloth maker American Fabrics. The site now houses an eclectic group of artists, manufacturers and other businesses.

"That's great news for the city of Bridgeport and the artist community and it will help to maintain the industrial base in the city," Mayor John M. Fabrizi said Monday.

In his budget, Fabrizi projected the bids on the property would bring in at least \$3.1 million; Monday, he said the two bidders cover that promise. The city took the property through foreclosure because the former owner owed back taxes.

The city received the bids late Friday night and released the names of the bidders but little else Monday, saying the bids have not been reviewed. The city said it will pick a developer by the end of this month and hopes to sign a contract before Aug. 1.

Both developers have completed projects in Bridgeport; Westrock has done mostly commercial work and E/N mostly housing.

Jerry Covallo, president of aerospace parts maker James Ippolito and Co., said because these are the only two bidders, the tenants are in a win-win situation.

Covallo and other tenants formed an association shortly after the city took the property in February. They worked with Westrock and E/N to create development plans that would allow a mix of artist studios and industrial business to be created in the complex.

Covallo said the association decided to back E/N's plan, which would allow tenants to buy and own their own space. But he said he thought highly of both companies.

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