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Artists in search of a new Nest

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The work lives of artists and artisans are spent, for the most part, in solitude -- thinking and creating.

Painters, sculptors, potters, textile artists, photographers, woodworkers, jewelry-makers, quilters often work alone -- and that can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection.

That's one of the reasons that some area artists have eschewed a home studio, opting instead for the "sense of community" that comes from renting space with like-minded individuals in one of Bridgeport's old factory buildings.

In the city's West End is one such artists' community: The Nest at 1341 Railroad Ave., in a building that was at one time owned by Casco Products, a manufacturer of automotive power outlets and cigarette lighters.

Soon, however, the Nest will be no more as plans by developer Garfield Spencer to transform the Nest building and other structures on the 2.5-acre spread into a 130-unit condominium complex were approved during the summer by the city's Planning and Zoning Commission.

This incubator for the arts has been home to about 30 artists at one time or another during the last seven years, said Victor Mulaire, the building's former owner, founder of Nest and owner of the Cricket Hosiery Co., which shares space in the Nest building.

The draw of these old factory buildings are many: inexpensive rents (which have been as low as a few dollars per square foot), open spaces and high ceilings, the availability of natural light that pours in through huge windows, and the camaraderie that's found among creative types with similar interests.

Mulaire, of Weston, said that although financial pressures forced him to sell his Nest building to Spencer -- "My back was up against a wall" -- he hasn't given up on the arts community concept, which "is good for the artists, good for me, good for the city." In fact, Mulaire and several other current and former Nest artists are now exploring the possibility, with the help of Bridgeport economic development officials, of finding a new home in another vacant vintage building where Mulaire and the artists could reunite.

And Mulaire reports that Spencer recently indicated that he and the artists probably will have about a year before they will be required to move because conversion of the Nest site is scheduled for the project's final phase. And that is "giving us some breathing room," he said.