

# Housing plan for West End industrial site takes step

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City Council has pinned high hopes on a plan to reuse the Brodart warehouse site at Memorial Avenue and Oliver Street.

The project involves cleaning up the soil and removing asbestos at the building, leveling the aged and vacant structure and turning it into a space for a developer to build attractive multi-family apartments, owner-occupied townhouses and two houses under the watch of Greater Lycoming Habitat for Humanity.

The hope is the project may end up transforming a former industrial and residential neighborhood in the city's West End, according to discussion by several on council Thursday night.

Council at the meeting unanimously approved a developers agreement between Greater Lycoming Habitat for Humanity, P&L Investments of Washington, D.C., the prime developer, the city, and the city Redevelopment Authority regarding the project.

A rather pleased-appearing city engineer John Grado, who also is director of community and economic development, told council two phases of clean up plans were approved by the state Department of Environmental Protection at the former manufacturing site and some of the financing is in place.

The next phases include a few hurdles, but the intention is to remediate or clean up the building's top soil, removing any trace contamination and any asbestos or other hazardous materials. The city will put bids out for that job and has received a grant for some of the clean up, Grado said.

Then, the building is to be dismantled to make room for building a 40-unit apartment complex, 32 townhouses and two Habitat for Humanity houses.

On Jan. 24, a public hearing will be held before council to change the zoning at the site from light manufacturing to residential/urban, Grado said.

That will be the first of two readings on the zoning designation ordinance, he said.

Another hurdle is the developer of the multi-family units needs to obtain tax credits from the Pennsylvania Finance Housing Agency, Grado said.

If all goes as planned, Grado said he anticipates the remediation and clearance of the property to take place as early as this spring.

Council President Bill Hall noted the project involves no city taxpayer dollars and is paid for through several funding measures, such as state grants and gas impact fee money.

"It brings together several good things happening at once," said Councilman Jonathan Williamson.

Williamson commented on the city's overall housing strategy, saying it is an example of public and private partnerships in action.

The housing strategy includes the Brodart site redevelopment, a neighborhood redevelopment for houses on Memorial Avenue and the neighborhood near the site and a 32-unit senior housing complex on Grove Street.

Several funding sources are meant to pay for the projects, including \$26.5 million focused on the housing portions, of which \$21 million is from private investment, \$4 million is state funding and \$1 million is funded locally by impact fees.

What council seems to like about the housing portion is it will be available for those with difference income levels but won't be subsidized housing.

The plan indicates it has the potential to revitalize an otherwise former industrial-residential part of the city that "could have gone in a different direction," Williamson said.

Councilwoman Liz Miele and Councilman Randall J. Allison sat on a housing needs committee four years ago when the project idea was first discussed.

Allison thought then it sounded interesting but "would be difficult to pull off."

Miele has congratulated the administration and her colleagues on the council for the work thus far to get the financing and planning in place and coordinate the project with the Lycoming County Department of Planning and Development as it moves into the next phases.