

Council to vote on housing at Brodart warehouse site

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City Council is scheduled to vote tonight on an agreement with a Bath, N.Y., company that wants to manage a 40-unit apartment building to be constructed after the demolition later this year of the now vacant Brodart warehouse site on Memorial Avenue.

Council's finance committee gave a positive recommendation Tuesday to the proposal and it is on the agenda for action by the full council when it meets at 7:30. The housing complex will be known as Memorial Homes.

"We were willing to give the recommendation because we support the project and what we think it will do for the city and neighborhood," said Councilman Jonathan Williamson, committee chairman. "It does not add to the taxpayers' contribution, either from a local or state perspective, and it doesn't change the overall project."

Under the agreement, the city would apply for a \$375,000 state grant with the state Department of Community and Economic Development, according to John Grado, city engineer and director of community and economic development.

Should the city be awarded the grant, it will pass the funds over to Steuben Churchpeople Against Poverty Inc., a non-profit organization that does business as Arbor Housing Development, of Bath, N.Y., he said.

Grado explained why the nonprofit is involved.

The development company overseeing the \$25 million project, P&L Investments, is planning to contract with NRP Group, of Cleveland, Ohio, the proposed builder of the apartments, he said.

P&L Investments is a Washington, D.C.-based firm that reinvests in brownfield sites that once were industrial properties that can be cleaned up and converted for residential or commercial use.

It is seeking tax credits from the state Housing Finance Agency to finance a portion of the project that includes 32 townhouses to be built after the apartments go up and a pad-ready area so that the Greater Lycoming Habitat for Humanity can build two single-family dwellings, Grado said.

Because P&L Investments is seeking tax credits, it is required to engage a nonprofit as a partner in the project, he said.

"It's just like when Yoder Builders joined with Lycoming Neighborhood Development Group, a nonprofit, when it sought tax credits to build apartments at Nichols Place," he said.

While receiving recommendations, the committee requested Grado provide examples of where Arbor Housing Development has managed apartments.

"Arbor and Steuben groups were new names for us, and we needed a good understanding of who they are and their role within the overall project. We learn from mistakes with recent agreements signed with a nonprofit and want a good sense of who our new partners are," Williamson said, without specifying to which nonprofit he was referring.

"We've met with other parts of the private partnership team and want the opportunity to meet with and understand the role of this partner as well," Williamson said.

The administration plans to prepare bids for the demolition companies in April and to have council vote to award the contract in May, Grado said.

Financing and land development are the final pieces to be decided, Grado said. Should these parts be in place, he estimated the apartments might be built by next summer.