

Funding approved for Brownsville development

By Christine Haines chains@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Sunday, May 24, 2015 2:00 am

The next phase of redevelopment for downtown Brownsville is getting a significant financial boost.

Several buildings along Market Street currently owned by the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority will be redeveloped by Trek Development of Pittsburgh, which currently has a purchase agreement for the four parcels, according to Andrew French, the executive director of the redevelopment authority.

The property development and management firm intends to demolish several downtown buildings and renovate another for use as a senior apartment building and parking area. New buildings will also be constructed, designed to blend with the current architecture in the historic downtown area.

The development will be almost directly across the street from a community stage and park initially proposed by the Students in Action at Brownsville Area High School. That project is already in early construction stages.

According to state Rep. Pam Snyder, D-Jefferson, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency approved \$750,000 in funding and \$692,279 in tax credits to launch the Brownsville Senior Housing Project.

“The financing is crucial to the exciting renewal efforts under way in downtown Brownsville,” Snyder said in a news release. “It’s a red-letter day for the borough, whose future now appears exponentially brighter.”

According to Trek Development project manager Trey Barbour, the tax credit



Brownsville senior housing

Submitted This architectural concept drawing is one option for a new 24-unit apartment building being developed by Trek Development for Brownsville senior housing.

approval is for a 10-year period, translating to more than \$6.9 million available for the development project.

“That’s syndicated with an investor, like a bank. They buy the credits from us and we invest it,” Barbour said.

Barbour said the project will involve the restoration of the five-story former G.C. Murphy Building at 5 Market St., primarily keeping the facade while opening the side of the building to connect with new construction at what is now 13-21 Market St. Barbour said that from the outside it will look like several smaller buildings, but it will actually be one building on the inside, housing 24 apartments for senior citizens with a parking lot for the apartments. The conceptual drawing calls for a facade that mimics the look of the historic downtown buildings it is replacing.

“They’re still conceptual. We can make it look like this or we can make it look different. We are working with city leadership. If they want something that looks more modern, we can do that too,” Barbour said.

Demolition is expected to start by year’s end and construction in the spring.

Brownsville Mayor Lester Ward said the renovation of the long-vacant buildings and new construction will boost the borough’s tax base.

“As we envision it right now, the bottom level will be for commercial development and the upper levels will be senior apartments,” Ward said. “Brownsville’s going to again move forward.”

The current plans call for retail space on the first floor of the new building and Snyder said the project meshes beautifully with the nearby Snowdon Square project to rehabilitate vacant lots along Market Street into a town square with stage for community events as well as Riverside Wharf Park improvements.

“Three historic, downtown buildings also are being restored by the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation, and the Brownsville Library is being expanded,” Snyder said. “The pace of renewal is quickening in Brownsville, providing tremendous encouragement for further improvements.”

There are also discussions of a possible expansion for Brownsville Free Public Library.

According to Snyder, the \$750,000 PennHomes funding from PHFA and federal accounts offers 0 percent interest and deferred payments to support development of rental housing. The tax credits, administered by PHFA, also are used to stimulate

construction of affordable housing.

“Before this program came out, there really weren’t a lot of ways to guarantee affordability.

Barbour said. “For a senior who may not be able to stay in their own house and mow the lawn, this provides an opportunity to move into affordable housing in the community, close to the pharmacy, library and activities downtown.” Barbour said.

Barbour said a deed restriction will limit residents of the new apartments to seniors over the age of 62 who meet income guidelines.

“This doesn’t mean public housing. It doesn’t mean Section 8 housing. The people will still have to pay rent,” Barbour said.

The PHFA funding follows approval in October 2014 of a \$175,000 state grant for Snowdon Square.

“So many people deserve to take a bow for the remake of Brownsville, including the students at Brownsville High School, borough and county officials, the TREK Development Group and Heinz Endowments,” Snyder said in her news release. “The entire community is invested in the rebirth of Brownsville.”