

# Redevelopment authority agrees to transfer property to Brownsville group

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The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority has agreed to turn over a Market Street property to Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation (BARC) despite a plea from Brownsville Borough Council to move in another direction.

In unanimous action on Wednesday, the authority board entered into a contract with BARC that would transfer the ownership of the property from the county agency to the group, along with an \$80,000 grant that will allow BARC to stabilize the structure on the property.

Over the past several months the possible property transfer to BARC has drawn criticism from Brownsville Borough Council and the local chamber, with members of both entities hoping the authority would move to have the dilapidated structure demolished.

BARC, however, has maintained that it is in the borough's and the region's best interest to preserve the property.

The two sides again made their respective cases to the authority on Wednesday.

Tammy Sealy, BARC president, said that the acquisition of the 29 Market St. site would allow the group to proceed with its rehabilitation of 27 Market St. and undertake the structural needs of the adjoining property. The site is to include a business and apartments.

"We have the match money to make the repairs (to 29 Market St.)," she said, adding that the authority is mandated to look at all redevelopment possibilities. "(To turn over the property) will allow (the authority) to complete your goals and will help BARC and Brownsville achieve its goals to revitalize the downtown."

According to Sealy, the group was ready to proceed with the renovation of the 27 Market St. site in late August when it was discovered that the roof of the adjacent building was causing water damage to the neighboring site.

The only recourse was to put the project on hold until repairs were made, she said.

Brownsville Borough Mayor Lester Ward, also a member of BARC, said he favored the

transfer of the property, but could not support also giving \$80,000 of the \$460,000 state grant set aside for the demolition of other borough properties to the organization.

“We want to get something done,” he said. “Three years ago the historical society wanted to conduct a study to determine what should be done, but in those three years, we haven’t done anything.”

Borough Council President Jack Lawver also asked that the full grant remain intact so that the borough could pursue the removal of blighted properties that have impeded the municipality’s efforts to revitalize all of Brownsville.

“This will jeopardize the rest of the town’s project,” he said.

During the discussion, Andrew French, authority executive director, said that the initial plan was to allow for the demolition of the 29 Market St. property. However, when BARC came forward with an alternative plan that included the matching of the \$80,000 grant and taking responsibility for the stabilization of the property, it was worthy of consideration.

French estimated the cost to demolish the building would be about \$60,000, but could not offer a figure to stabilize the two adjoining properties.

“I don’t think it could be done for \$20,000,” said Phil Michael, authority member.

Sealy, meanwhile, said that BARC has received an estimate of \$165,000 from a Pittsburgh construction firm to complete the work.

According to the contract terms, BARC is required to have the stabilization work done within three years.

In addition to Michael, board members Paul Bortz, Jonathon Garlow and Dale Malinzak voted to support the action. Board member Dee John was absent from the meeting.

In unrelated matters, the board agreed to hold its next meeting on Jan. 8 at 11 a.m.