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## LOCAL GMVLB AND MVC PROJECTS

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Joshua Thomas — The Mohawk Valley Collective, Inc. aims to repair the West Hill School's roof, rebuild its chimney, and complete masonry work around the structure by early December.

By JOSHUA THOMAS  
C-S-E Editor

CANAJOHARIE — Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank Executive Director Tolga Morawski updated the Canajoharie

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Village Board regarding two local projects Tuesday, including an upcoming demolition and creation of a historic observation location.

Morawski also provided an update about an upcoming, \$380,000 Mohawk Valley Collective, Inc. project aimed at repairing the roof and rebuilding the chimney at West Hill School.

The GMVLB has completed asbestos abatement at 153 Erie Boulevard, also receiving five bids for the building's demolition, which is expected to take place in October.

Though no demolition bid has been accepted yet, Morawski said the low bid — placed by a local company — "is very good."

He noted that a neighboring business has expressed interest in the property.

Morawski also detailed the GMVLB's plans for the Hoke House, an important locale for abolitionism in Montgomery County.

The Hoke House is a historic building once owned by Chester "Bromley" and Elizabeth Phillips Hoke, descendants of grandparents who had been locally enslaved. Chester served in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, one of the nation's first black troops to fight in the Civil War.

Morawski said the GMVLB is currently working with a firm out of Albany, along with the Hoke family and Montgomery County Historian Kelly Yacobucci Farquhar to draft a feasibility study regarding the creation of a historic observation area at the property.

The Hoke House project would, said Morawski, preserve the history of the Hoke family and their connection to the Civil War. The property, he added, could also potentially provide a lodging space for people traveling on the Erie Canal (bike) Trail.

Former mayor Francis Avery questioned how the GMVLB will function if state grants cease, noting that New York State is currently in poor financial condition.

Responded Morawski, "The purpose of the land bank and the goal from the outset was to be sustainable." The GMVLB, he explained, has rehabbed 10-12 properties that have since been sold — two in Fultonville, three in Fort Plain, and several in other counties — and returned to the tax rolls, with eight sales pending.

The GMVLB also has five rehabilitation projects expected to take place within the next two months, those properties

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having been appraised at approximately \$80,000-\$100,000 each, the eventual sale funding future projects.

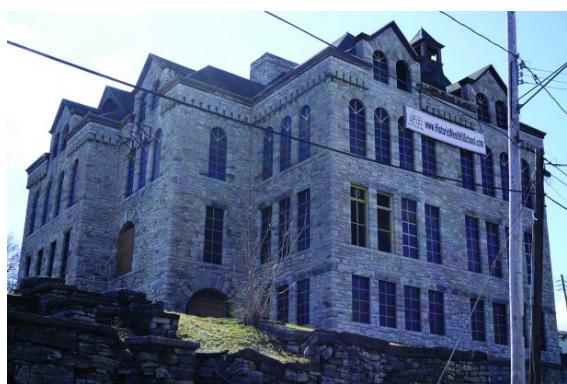
the GMVLB, Morawski added, has several revenue-generating properties that cover administrative costs, with the state also providing money it accumulates in malfeasance penalties. Of that funding, he continued, "Through that, we hope to be sustainable, but we also expect that as our funds are not taxpayer based ... that they will not be effected by the New York State budget."

"At the end of the day, the reason we did this is because of the investment," Morawski said of the GMVLB's creation, pointing out that the organization has spent over \$500,000 on projects in Montgomery County. "If you think of it just in terms of demolitions," with the one taking place in October in Canajoharie estimated at \$30,000-\$40,000, "That's money the taxpayers won't have to pay."

As Morawski also volunteers with the Mohawk Valley Collective, Inc., which owns West Hill School in the village, he provided an update regarding that property. The MVC recently signed a bid agreement to commence with roof repair work.

The roof repair was originally slated to begin in March — the \$380,000 project also including the rebuilding of the structure's chimney and dealing with masonry issues around the building — though the project was pushed back because of COVID-19.

The shingles to be used in the project are on site, and scaffolding is being moved about inside the West Hill School, with that project's expected completion date being early December.



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Photo submitted — The West Hill School chimney will be rebuilt as part of an upcoming \$380,000 Mohawk Valley Collective, Inc. project.

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