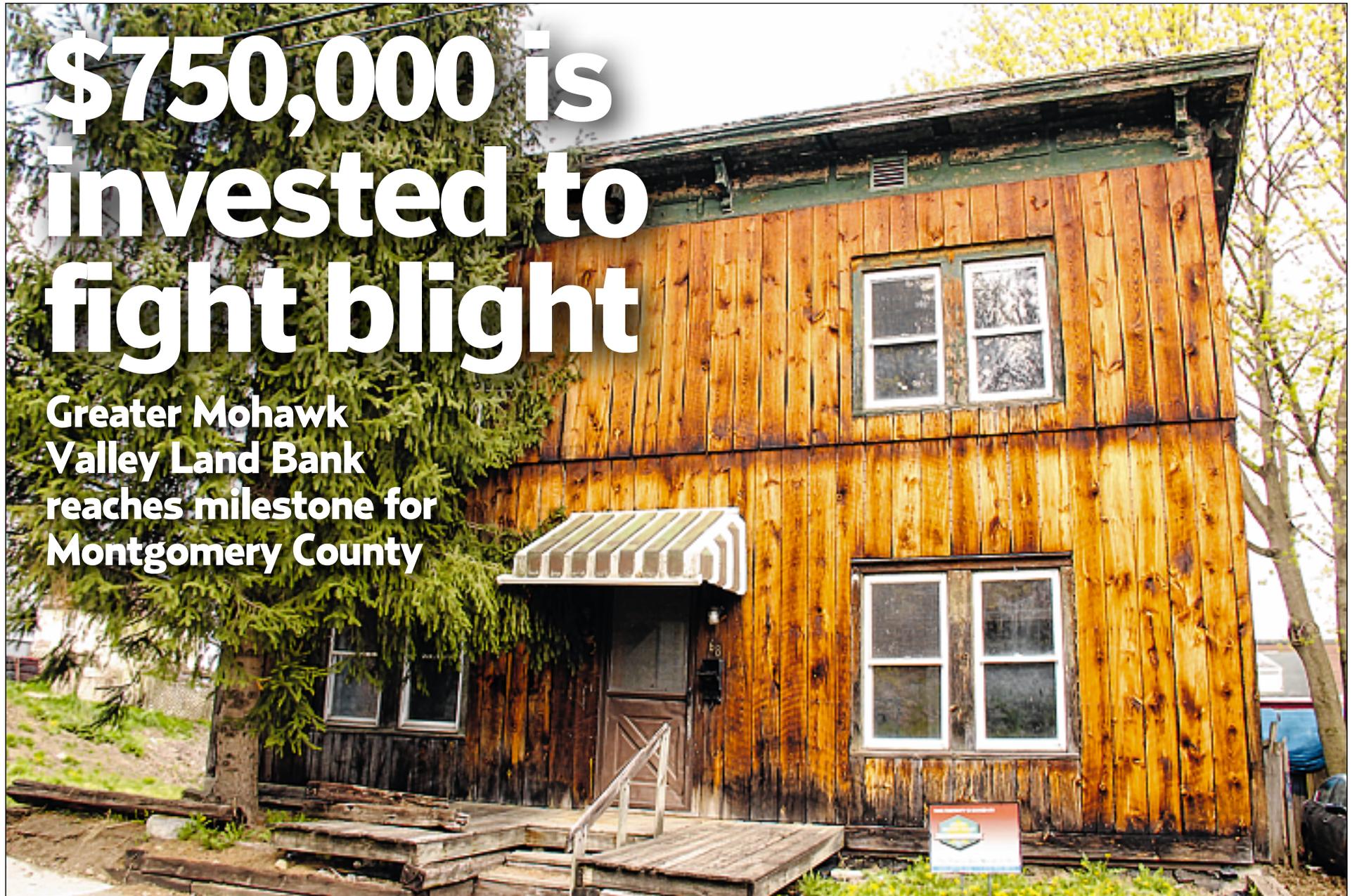


# Courier-Standard-Enterprise

THE WEEK OF APRIL 30-MAY 6, 2021

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## \$750,000 is invested to fight blight

Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank reaches milestone for Montgomery County

BY JOSHUA THOMAS  
C-S-E Editor

FORT PLAIN — The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank recently reached a milestone — the organization has invested some \$750,000 to rehabilitate and demolish blighted properties throughout Montgomery County, and is now preparing those properties for market.

The two-story building at 58 Center St. in Fort Plain was listed for sale just last week. That property — with its first-level fireplace and wooden floors — now floods with warming natural light on a sunny day.

Down the street from that newly-renovated home is 68 Center St., which is slated for a similar makeover by the land bank. The home there has undergone asbestos testing and abatement and is now on deck to get a complete rehabilitation.

Adjacent to that building, at 70



JOSHUA THOMAS/C-S-E EDITOR

**Top:** 68 Center St., Fort Plain, has been cleared of asbestos and is ready for rehabilitation. **Above:** GMVLB Executive Director Tolga Morawski shows newly installed appliances at 58 Center St., Fort Plain, which was rehabilitated and recently put up for sale.

Center St., a house with foundation issues was demolished by the land bank with the goal of pairing the two lots so an eventual owner of the neighboring home will have significant yard

space.

The home at 21 State St. in the village is expected to go on the market in about two weeks af-

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# Blight

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ter the final punch list items are completed.

When the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank acquired the Center and State Street properties in May 2018, Executive Director Tolga Morawski said they were “disasters.” Like many homes the land bank acquires, the rehabilitative work at 21 State St. aimed to repair a litany of previous cobble jobs. “We really had to go through and do a lot to correct prior issues,” Morawski explained.

The land bank invested about \$100,000 to renovate just the 21 State St. home, revitalizing the property from top to bottom, including the installation of new heating and hot water systems, flooring, and appliances, with the organization hiring primarily local contractors to complete the project’s various jobs.

Because the goal is to keep the properties affordable so they can serve as family starter homes — banks provide the land bank with gap funding grants, which help make it possible to stabilize the low prices of revitalized properties for potential homebuyers.

The land bank has helped save blighted structures throughout



the historic village, according to Fort Plain Mayor Mark Nearbin, who called the group’s work encouraging.

“I’m looking forward to having a couple of new families come

into our village” should the properties sell soon, said Nearbin, who added that the land bank’s restoration work is “extremely helpful to our village.”

Often, structures follow one of two paths to dilapidation. Sometimes, they’re abandoned and simply left to rot, or, an out-of-town investor buys a building at an auction, slaps some paint on it, and then rents it out. The condition of those homes often continues to worsen and are then rented to individuals not equipped to improve the property while it degrades until it is uninhabitable.

Land bank properties are sold to people with income levels below the area’s median income, which for a family of four in Montgomery County for 2021 is \$59,000. Eighty percent of the land bank’s inventory must be accessible to those in that income bracket while 20% of the land bank’s properties may be sold at a price above that eligibility level, according to guidelines promulgated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

“Essentially, to renovate a house and put in new equipment and do everything over, it costs more than what it’ll sell for,” Morawski said. “Since we’re in a somewhat depressed market, you might not get the value that you would elsewhere, and those grants help with that gap.”

The local land bank is “focused on outcome-based sales” and the group is continually concerned with sustained community improvement — which is why sale-with-scope projects remain



JOSHUA THOMAS/C-S-E EDITOR

**Both:** The inside of the newly renovated 21 State St., Fort Plain, is seen.

an important component of its success, Morawski said. In such an instance, a home in need of work is sold with a clawback in the deed that requires occupants to improve the property over a one-year period.

The clawback option ensures that if the promised work is not completed, or is not done to the standard expected, the land bank can reclaim the property.

Said Morawski of the sale-with-scope projects currently taking place throughout the county, including one in Fonda, “It allows us to do more projects than if we were doing them all ourselves.”

Demolitions also remain an important component of the land bank’s local work. Morawski explained that people don’t often realize the potential cost of such a project — easily tens-of-thousands of dollars. Demolitions of unsafe structures remain hard for villages and towns to take

on by themselves, as a \$35,000 demolition alone would likely cost more than a local entity can raise annually due to the state’s forced tax cap.

While the land bank has remained active throughout the last year, Morawski said that the work the group was able to accomplish recently slowed down significantly once COVID-19 became an ever-looming threat. Work stopped at area properties in early 2020, with grant providers insisting that projects be paused to curb risk.

Home rehabilitation has “been a stop and go,” process, said Morawski, who noted that appliances and materials — especially wood — have been hard to acquire within the necessary timeframe recently. Canadian lumber is in limited supply because of fires, increased tariffs, and a beetle infestation, which

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**John DeAugustine**  
Publisher

**Bob O’Leary**  
VP Advertising

**Miles Reed**  
Editor

**Mary Anne Semkiw**  
Advertising Contact  
518-526-0116

**Joshua Thomas**  
Managing Editor

**News Room 518-395-3104**  
**Contact Us at news@dailygazette.net**

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**Courier-Standard-Enterprise**  
100 East Main Street, Amsterdam, NY 12010  
Phone: (518) 843-1100 or 1-800-453-6397  
[www.courierstandardenterprise.com](http://www.courierstandardenterprise.com)

# Blight

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“really diminished the supply of lumber,” and led to costs tripling.

At a current land bank rehabilitation project in St. Johnsville, it took four months to acquire the custom roof trusses needed to move the job forward, a transaction which normally would’ve taken just a couple of weeks to complete.

With many home repairs taking place across the area recently, it’s also taken extended amounts of time to acquire appliances for land bank homes.

Along with the projects recently completed, nearing completion, or entering the next phase in the village of Fort Plain, the land bank has also notably undertaken costly demolitions in Palatine Bridge, including those of outbuildings at the old Stone Lodge, where land bank work is underway to determine options for the facility’s potential future re-use.



JOSHUA THOMAS/C-S-E EDITOR

The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank will finish rehabilitating 21 State St., Fort Plain, in about two weeks.

A rehabilitation project will also move forward at the historic Hoke House in Canajoharie soon; the goal is to install an informational space outlining the facility’s past, along with an upstairs way-station for canal travelers.

A costly demolition also recently took place in the Village of Canajoharie, along with others in Fultonville, with several of the cleared lots there currently re-

ceiving offers for potential new construction.

“We’re always interested in helping out,” the local area and community, said Morawski of the goals of the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank. Property owners and individuals looking to buy are welcome to contact him with questions, he said. The land bank may be reached at 315-823-0814 or at [info@gmvlb.org](mailto:info@gmvlb.org).

## NEWS BRIEFS

### FPCSD board adopts proposed \$21.8 million budget with no tax levy increase

FORT PLAIN — The Fort Plain Board of Education adopted a proposed \$21,875,000 budget for the 2021-22 school year at its April 14 meeting. The proposed budget would maintain all academic programming with no increase in the tax levy.

The proposed budget is an increase of \$500,000, or 2.34%, over the current-year budget, but does not raise the tax levy, as funds would be allocated from increased state aid to cover school faculty and staffing costs, as well as adding offerings such as summer and after-school enrichment.

When district residents vote on the proposed budget on May 18, they will also consider a referendum authorizing the district to acquire school vehicles at a maximum cost of \$275,000, with the funds to be drawn from the Bus Purchase Reserve Fund. The purchase would not have an impact on the tax levy, and would allow the district to replace aging buses and minimize maintenance costs.

Voters will also elect two members of the Board of Education for three-year terms running from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2024, to succeed Mary Beth

Hudyncia and Kimberly Keane, whose terms expire on June 30, 2021.

“Our goal is to always put forward a responsible budget that maintains high quality programming. This year, we can achieve this with zero impact on the tax levy,” Superintendent John Bishop said.

### Proposed OESJ 2021-22 budget keeps taxes steady

ST. JOHNSTVILLE — Superintendent Adam Heroth has proposed a \$21.297 million Openheim-Ephratah-St. Johnsville Central School District budget for the 2021-22 school year that keeps taxes steady compared with the 2020-21 school year.

The state’s tax levy increase for OESJ is 1.33%.

“We are still analyzing the details of the upcoming budget, but at this time we feel a tax increase may not be necessary. This is in large part due to the fact that the district has been fiscally responsible over the years,” said Heroth.

However, he stressed that the rate may need to be increased in future years.

Last year, taxes were increased by 0.37%, by 3% in 2019-20 and by 1% in the 2018-19 school year. In the five years prior to that (after the school district merger), taxes were not increased.

In early March, Heroth re-

viewed the budget for the OESJ Board of Education.

The public hearing on the 2021-22 spending plan will be held at 6 p.m., May 5 at the OESJ Elementary School. The community-wide public vote is scheduled for 12 to 8 p.m. on Tuesday, May 18.

The budget is based on Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s state aid estimates in January; the Legislature may add aid to schools before adopting a budget. And the use of the federal stimulus funding is still unknown. However, that money is designed to provide stability to school finances and avoid a fiscal “cliff” until June 2024.

“We will continue to balance the educational needs of our students with what the taxpayers can afford,” Heroth said.

During a budget presentation, Heroth noted that 59% of the budget goes for salaries and benefits and 11% is for debt payments.

The budget adds a Jr./Sr. High School math teacher, an elementary teacher and includes a health insurance premium increase of 10-20% (\$400,000-\$500,000 increase) though the district continues to negotiate with the insurance companies.

The budget includes these reductions: transportation supervisor, special education teacher, and two retirees from the fall have not yet been replaced.

## OBITUARIES

### Ronald E. Pabis

Ronald E. Pabis, born May 19, 1956 and at rest April 19, 2021.

If you’ve ever been invited on a “Hot Date” for spaghetti, received a proposal for marriage where you were offered a blue dress and a trip to Hawaii, been whistled at, serenaded to a Johnny Cash song while being played the air guitar or danced to Polka music, then you had the special privilege of spending some quality time with Ronnie. He was a loveable little package and wasn’t afraid to express his affection to anyone. He could play out skits from the Three Stooges better than any top fan. His independence was a dominant trait, some would classify as stubborn and if you tried to do something for him you were sure to hear, “No, Me”! Ronnie was a cunning jokester and when you were the target of his shenanigans, his giggles filled the room and were beyond contagious. He enjoyed spending time near or on the water, especially if it involved picnics or dinner cruises on a boat. Ronnie was a walking TV guide and could recite the daytime and nighttime line-ups from the Price is Right to General Hospital to the nightly news, Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy. He loved spending time with loved ones, especially with his extended families. He ensured that he secured his place at their dinner table for the next holiday before he left their house and made his requests for what the meal should include. He was always planning ahead for another date. Ronnie loved his sweets as much as he loved his friends and family. He looked forward to receiving cards from his cousins and video calls from his friends, always trying to “smooch” them through the screen. He always knew how to swoon the ladies, winning their hearts and the title “Casanova”.

Ron was predeceased by his parents, Edward and Lorayn Pabis, and his uncle and aunt caregivers, Thomas and Klara Czeluzniak. He is survived by several cousins.

Visitation for family and friends was held on Tuesday April 27, from 10am-12pm at the Amsterdam Funeral Chapel 13 Belmont Pl. Amsterdam, NY 12010. Service will be held at 12pm, and burial will follow at St. Stanislaus Cemetery in Amsterdam.



### Jennie M. Mower

Miss Jennie M. Mower, 101, formerly of Fort Plain, New York died Monday, April 12, 2021 at Palatine Nursing Home.

Born on October 29, 1919 in Sharon Springs, NY, she was the daughter of Raymond D. Mower and Charlotte Mallette Mower. She was a graduate of Sharon Springs High School and was a lifetime area resident.

Jennie was the bookkeeper for the family farm and worked for Beech-Nut in Canajoharie on the Assembly Line in the Gum Department.

She enjoyed gardening and cooking. She loved her horses, pets, and animals when she was on the farm.

Her sisters, Irene Zeus and L. Grace Mower predeceased her.

Miss Mower is survived by her nieces, Diane I. Ackerman of Indian Lake, NY, Helene Carpenter of North Carolina; great-nephews, Raymond Ackerman, Keith Carpenter; great-nieces, Denise Ackerman Scoba, Carrie Shaffer; and many cousins.

A graveside service will be held on Friday, June 11, 2021 at 11:00AM at Fort Plain Cemetery.

Contributions in memory of Jennie M. Mower may be made to the American Cancer Society.

Please sign the online guestbook for Miss Jennie Mower at [www.houghtalingandsmith.com](http://www.houghtalingandsmith.com).