$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 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 after PAMV clears Route 5S...
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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 cobbled 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.

Thelandbankhashelpedsave 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 sold at a price below 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 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.

Morawski said there might be just 100 homes the land bank acquires in a year. In the early 2000s, for example, there might be 500. But the land bank has made it clear that if the promised work is not completed, or is not done to the standard expected, the land bank can reclaim the property.

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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 trans- action 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 several 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.

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 voted 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 Edu- cation for three-year terms running from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2024, to succeed Mary Beth Hudynca and Kimberly Keane, whose terms expire on June 30, 2021.

“ar 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 Bish- op said.

Proposed OESJ 2021-22 budget keeps taxes steady

ST. JOHNSVILLE — Superintendent Adam Heroth has proposed a $21,917,000 budget for the 2021-22 school year that keeps taxes steady compared to the 2020-21 school year.

The state’s tax levy increase for OESJ is 1.38%.

“We are still analyzing the de- tails 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 re- sponsible 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 0.3% 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.

Proposed OESJ 2021-22 spending plan will be introduced on Monday, May 3, at the OESJ Elementary School. The community-wide public vote is scheduled for 12 to 8 p.m. on May 18.

The budget is based on Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s state aid es- timates in January; the Legis- lature may add aid to schools before adopting a budget. And the use of the federal stimulus fund is still unknown. How- ever, that money is designed to provide stability to school fi- nances and avoid a fiscal “cliff” until June 2024.

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

During a budget presenta- tion, 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 re- ductions in transportation supervisor, special education teacher, and two retirees from the fall have not yet been re- placed.

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 his- toric Hoke House in Canajohar- rie soon; the goal is to install an informational space outlining the facility’s past, along with an up-to-date station for canal travelers.

A costly demolition also re- cently 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. Prop- erty 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 info@gmvlb.org.

NEWS BRIEFS

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 whisked 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 love- able 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 joker 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 wa- ter, 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, especial- ly with his extended families. He ensured that he secured his place at their dinner tables for every 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 try- ing to “smooch” them through the screen. He always knew how to swag 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. Stanslaus Cemetery in Amsterdam.

Jennie M. Mower


Born on October 29, 1919 in Sharon Springs, NY, she was the daughter of Raymond D. Mower and Charlotte Mollette Mower. She was a graduate of Sharan 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. Ack- erman of Indian Lake, NY, Helene Carpenter of North Caro- lina; 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.