

Homesteading with a heart

Developer has vision to replace blight with homes for families

BY MICHAEL PUFFER

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — There are two houses and no residents left on the seven lots lining Adams Street in an otherwise densely populated part of Waterbury’s North End.

The blocks around Adams Street are known for decaying houses, addiction and violence. Just after noon on Thursday, a young woman tottered unsteadily from an overgrown and trash-filled yard on Adams Street to ask a visiting photographer for a loan of 50 cents. The house is boarded up and its second floor is hollowed out by fire.

The only other home on the street is also in an advanced state of decay and boarded. The houses that occupied the other lots have all been demolished over time.

On Tuesday, the Connecticut Bond Commission approved a \$355,000 grant to help an ambitious effort to redevelop Adams Street.

Kevin Taylor, executive director of **Neighborhood Housing Services**, has a vision of six modernistic two-family houses and a small park, with a rebuilt street, sidewalks and lighting. He’s designed durable, energy efficient homes to minimize ownership costs. He estimates costs at about \$4 million.

The plan calls for two-family houses to be sold at costs ranging from \$130,000 to \$150,000 to families making 50 percent to 80 percent of area median income. At present, that’s a yearly income of \$51,300 to \$82,080 for a family of four.

Neighborhood Housing Services is dedicated to revitalizing neighborhoods through homeownership. For Taylor, Adams Street is something of a blank slate.

“This was an opportunity to do a significant development, a whole block,” Taylor said. “It’s one of the main entrances to the Crownbrook **Neighborhood**. It will be a good change for that particular area as far as cleaning up blighted properties. It’s sort of a new beginning for a

neighborhood.”

Taylor and his partners have been working on the *See HOMES*, Page 9A



Kevin Taylor, executive director of Neighborhood Housing Services in Waterbury, has an ambitious plan to transform a blighted and deserted block on Adams Street into a modern, sustainable development.

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HOMES: More

funding needed

Continued from 3A

project for the past seven years. **Neighborhood Housing Services** bought five lots from the city at \$1,150 apiece, and paid \$10,000 for a sixth property at a city tax

from the bond commission, prior grants and commitments made by the city, **Neighborhood Housing Services** has the \$1.3 million needed for the first phase to begin this fall, Taylor said.

This will include rebuilding the roadway, demolishing the two

“Since I work over here and was born and raised over here I like to see everything stay clean,” Booker said.

Booker hadn’t heard of the planned redevelopment, but said he’d welcome “something to make people proud of living back around here.

auction. A seventh was purchased from its owner for \$24,900.

The development area neighbors the Refuge Church of Christ on Hawkins Street.

Pastor Jason L. Ward, 47, grew up in the North End. Members of his church have cleaned and mowed the Adams Street properties closest to the church. Ward believes the owners of the new duplexes will keep the area clean.

“When you have homeownership, you have a higher level of investment by the residents,” Ward said. “One of the things we see is there seems to be a lack of real care in the **neighborhood.**”

Adams Street will be the biggest project yet that Taylor has performed with the group, although he has aspirations for bigger redevelopments on nearby streets.

Neighborhood Housing Services has struggled to gather all the needed funds.

Taylor had to scrap plans for underground electric utilities and geothermal heating and cooling. The designs still carry rooftop solar panels.

Taylor has had to approach the construction in phases. With Tuesday’s commitment

houses on the street and building two duplex houses.

If all goes well, Taylor hopes to gather about \$2.7 million more needed to finish the other four duplexes, and start their construction in 2021.

Taylor said he’s already begun speaking with state Rep. Geraldo Reyes Jr., seeking additional assistance. Reyes helped shepherd the latest bond allocation over the finish line, Taylor said.

Reyes said such **housing** developments are needed to keep up with the loss of other **housing** stock, such as fires on Colley Street this month and Lounsbury Street in 2017 that claimed dozens of apartments.

“I don’t believe we are keeping up with the need,” Reyes said. “That’s why I support these developments.”

There are mounds of dumped furniture and trash along portions of Adams Street, but the corner of Adams and Grove streets is relatively clean. Sixty-two-year-old Tim Booker picked up bits of litter from that end using a grabbing stick and a five-gallon bucket Thursday afternoon. He said he’s worked for the Chapman Memorial funeral home, located just across Grove Street, for six years.

“It would be a good thing to do,” Booker said. “I remember when all this was built up. Back in the day this was real nice.”



A designer’s rendering of the Adams Street development planned by Neighborhood Housing Services of Waterbury.

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