

“KEVIN TAYLOR CAME DOWN LIKE AN ANGEL. HE’S GIVING US OPTIONS TO RESTORE NOT ONLY THE BUILDING, BUT ALSO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, AND ALL THE NORTH END.” - THE REV. JOSE REYES OF SHEKINAH CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Vacant factory in Waterbury could be transformed

Vision includes 100 housing units, retail markets, cafe and gym

BY MIKE PATRICK
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

A WATERBURY sprawling, vacant factory on North Main Street might become the site of more than 100 housing units, as well as retail markets, a cafe and even a gym.

The Connecticut Community Foundation recently granted Neighborhood Housing Services of Waterbury \$12,000 toward a \$55,000 feasibility study for the possible renovation of the former Radio-Research Instrument Co., a six-story, 186,000-square-foot, L-shaped factory building with a block-long wall of crumbling brick familiar to drivers on North Main Street.

“It’s going to be mixed-income housing. We can get about 100-plus units there, studio to three- or four-bedroom,” Kevin Taylor, executive director of NHSW, said. “There’s discussion of either doing a cafe or coffee shop there. That’s some of the things put on the table.”

The Radio-Research Instrument Co. property was purchased about nine years ago by Shekinah Christian Church, which planned to establish a seminary-type school on the second floor and an international shopping bazaar on the ground floor.

That plan remains, according to the Rev. Jose Reyes, the church’s pastor.

“Back then, I didn’t know what I was going to do with the rest of the floors because there was so much square footage,” Reyes said. “Kevin Taylor came

down like an angel. He’s giving us options to restore not only the building, but also the whole community, and all the North End.”

Reyes’ church has a history of improving properties in the North End. Several years ago, it renovated a vacant lot known for drug activity and prostitution into a small park the church uses for functions.

The church has acquired properties all over the North End and refurbished them into rental properties that provide decent, clean and attractive homes in neighborhoods known for blight.

The rental income from those properties gave the church the means to purchase the factory, a one-time government contractor that made equipment used in fighter jets and guided missile systems.

Church members spent years cleaning it out, one floor per year. Reyes keeps his office there now.

Taylor said though the brick exterior is in disrepair, the structure of the building is strong and sound.

“We could add some other commercial retail space to the building. We’re talking about some sort of fitness center there for the community,” he said. “And NHSW may have our offices located there as well.”

He said there are also discussions about local colleges moving some classes into the building.

But whether the project is feasible — financially or otherwise — won’t be known until the study is complete, he said.



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From left, Leslie Reyes and the Rev. Jose Reyes of Shekinah Christian Church stand with Kevin Taylor of Neighborhood Housing Services at 526 North Main St. in Waterbury on Friday. Neighborhood Housing Services of Waterbury and Shekinah Christian Church are working together on a proposal to turn a massive warehouse on North Main Street into a thriving community of affordable housing and shops.

“We have a lot of thoughts, we have a lot of ideas, but we need to get this down on paper, figure out what the costs are going to be for the rehab,” Taylor said. “We’re a small organization and we don’t have the capacity, nor have we shown in the past that we’ve done a project of this magnitude. So, we’re going to need to partner with an agency. But we need to present them with the information.”

Taylor said the final piece of the its \$55,000 cost should be in place soon, and the six-month study should begin in April.

State Rep Geraldo Reyes, D-75th District (no relation to the pastor) who said he spent his teenage years in the North End, said he could see the project drawing city, state and federal funding.

“It’s a tremendous project; a great use of a structure with great bones and

lots of potential,” he said. “I’ve had many conversations with Pastor Reyes about that particular site, as well as with Mr. Taylor. We’ve walked that many times. The project has strong, strong potential and can serve a great need for the city of Waterbury when it comes to affordable housing.”

Jose Reyes said he sees the project as having an even greater effect on the neighborhood.

“If that turns into apartments, the North End is going to be revitalized in a way that there will be businesses and the stores around will be jammed with people buying stuff,” Reyes said. “It’s going to impact the whole neighborhood in a great way.”

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