

'NEIGHBORHOOD COMING UP'

Crownbrook is changing for the better

Fanny Marone lives in the same Summer Street home that her family has owned in Waterbury for generations. She has watched her beloved Crownbrook neighborhood change over the decades.

But even though those changes were sometimes not for the better, Marone held fast to her home and to her neighborhood.

"I hang in because I just see how it was and I see how it can be even better," Marone, president of the Crownbrook Neighborhood Association, said. "It's my vision, it's my heart and I stick it out."

Now, with the grassroots efforts of Marone and a corps of volunteers, as well as attention by Neighborhood Housing Services, the changes in Crownbrook are again positive ones.

"Things are moving; the neighborhood is coming up," she said. "I think we're going to have a nice, viable neighborhood, and it will bring more stability."

One major upcoming project will be the complete redevelopment of Adams Street, a tiny road connecting Grove and Hawkins streets where only vacant houses stand.

Kevin Taylor, executive director of Neighborhood Housing Services, hopes to break ground by fall on his ambitious project to raze the buildings and replace them with six two-unit, owner-occupied homes with geothermal energy systems.

Geothermal will heat and cool a home by tapping into a temperature-consistent layer more than 200 feet below ground. "The annual home spends about \$2,200 a year in energy costs," Taylor said.

See BEAT , Page 7B



BEAT:**'Taking down a street and redoing it'**

"We've been able to get that down to approximately \$300. You're looking at an 88 percent savings in energy costs."

Marone praised NHS's efforts.

"He's taking down an entire street and redoing it," she said. "When you do something like that, you do something that really makes an impact."

But for Taylor, there's more to building a neighborhood than simply putting up houses. Community pride and responsibility are what will sustain it long term.

He said he plans to bring to Crownbrook the "community building and engagement" practices that have already made great strides in the long-neglected NEWPAC neighborhood nearby.

There, NHS sponsored events such as block parties and movie nights, geared specifically toward getting neighbors out and meeting each other.

The idea is, he said, once those folks are engaged in their community and take pride in where they live, they not only take better care of it, they can be groomed to become neighborhood advocates.

Part of those efforts is the Resident Leadership Program, which teaches residents how to rally for a neighborhood cause.

"This year we'll be working closer with the Crownbrook Neighborhood Association," Taylor said, adding NHS will be more involved in the association's meetings, and will organize neighborhood cleanups, as it has already done in NEWPAC.

"Those are the things that bring neighborhoods together, so he's doing it the right way," Marone said.

Marone has also been involved in beautifying Crownbrook. A few years ago, when members of her church participated in an effort to scrape and repaint the peeling exterior of an elderly woman's home, she said Mayor Neil M. O'Leary happened to stop by and was so impressed, he arranged for workers to come in and install vinyl siding.

Marone was also involved in a successful bid for state money to improve the neighborhood. She, Sharon Hallock of the Greater Waterbury Board of Realtors, and landlord advocate Robert De Cosmo worked with state Rep. Larry B. Butler, D72nd District, to bring a \$720,000 state grant to Waterbury. Part of that money is to be used to improve Elizabeth, Burton, Beacon, Summer and Crown streets.

That effort has slowed a bit, she said, as the group learned the money couldn't be as freely used for rehabilitating houses, and instead is tied to energy-efficiency projects.

Still, Marone said she's heartened to see private investors returning to Crownbrook, including one rehabilitating a multifamily house on Burton Street, and the demolition of a blighted, long-vacant gas station at the corner of Cooke and Grove streets, where a supermarket is planned.

She's even started her own, little community garden on a vacant lot on Burton Street.

"It needs attention; it needs people willing to just stick it out and make a difference," she said of the neighborhood. "Finally, I see some light, really."

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Fanny Marone stands for a portrait outside her home on Summer Street in Waterbury on Tuesday.

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