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Westmoreland County Redevelopment Authority & Land Bank initiative awarded PHARE grant funding to rehabilitate historic Vandergrift building

Greensburg, PA (June 10, 2022) – The East Vandergrift “Morning Sun” school, located at 434 McKinley Avenue, has long been the source of many conflicting feelings within its community. Located along the main thoroughfare in this small borough, the school was constructed in the 1930s, and functioned as such until its closure in the 1970s. The building cycled through a series of owners and uses; the building was most recently being utilized as a community worship center which closed its doors about ten years ago. Despite its deep ties to the history of East Vandergrift, a decade of vacancy took its toll not only on the building, but on the community it resides in. Despite calls for preservation, many residents felt the best solution for the structure would be to demolish it, rather than to let it continue to deteriorate and pose an ever increasing risk to the health and safety of the neighborhood.

In 2020, the Westmoreland County Land Bank acquired the property, and after several preliminary building evaluations by engineers and architects, the building was determined to be capable of being rehabilitated, and public opinion began to change, with the hope that the building may and should be saved to maintain the community’s connectivity and ties to its past. Upon acquisition of the property, the WCLB entered into an agreement to transfer the property to MVAH, an affordable housing developer, who intend to use the structure to promote safe and affordable housing opportunities for low-to-moderate income senior residents of the County. Upon completion of an interior rehabilitation, the building will contain 41 senior living (age 62+) one and two-bedroom apartment units 19 of which will be targeted to senior residents at 50% of below area median income levels.

Key to the success of this plan was funding through PHARE (the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement) grants. Recently, Governor Wolf’s office announced recipients of a new round of funding for housing programs; RACW/LB staff were thrilled to learn that the East Vandergrift “Morning Sun” school was among those recipients.

Hallie Chatfield, Senior Project Manager, was instrumental throughout the entire process. Of being awarded the grant funds, she said, “It feels like we were in limbo with this project for so long that to be awarded the grant money that will enable us to move forward is a huge sigh of relief. We’ve put a lot of work into making this happen, and we are extremely grateful for not only the PHARE grant, but also the work that our partners have put in to make this all come together.”

The Westmoreland County Redevelopment Authority & Land Bank work hand in hand with local officials and like-minded organizations to carry out residential and commercial rehabilitation, blight demolition, acquisition and repurposing of vacant and tax-delinquent properties, accessible and affordable housing, training and education partnerships, historic preservation, and brownfield redevelopment, all to make the communities of Westmoreland County more desirable places in which to live, work, raise a family and prosper.

For more information on the Westmoreland County Redevelopment Authority & Land Bank, visit:
www.westmorelandredevelopment.com

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