

Work progresses on Memorial Avenue development

August 1, 2014

By SAMANTHA WALLACE (swallace@sungazette.com), Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Construction on Memorial Homes is on pace in the 1600 block of Memorial Avenue, with siding and stone veneer going up fast.

A year ago, a blighted, long-vacant warehouse stood on the site. Now, a three-story, 40-unit apartment complex is rising. Also planned are 32 additional townhouses and two single-family dwellings.

On the other side of the city, in the East End, wooden stakes poke through the grass lot between Grove and Almond streets. It is site of a 32-unit senior housing complex, to be called Grove Street Commons. SEDA-Council of Governments Housing Development Corp. of Lewisburg is the developer.



"What a transformation view," said City Councilman Randall J. Allison, chairman of the city's economic revitalization committee, of the Memorial Homes construction. He remembers the blight, the bricks, the rubble and the neighbors wondering what might be coming.

Construction to complete Memorial Homes is estimated at \$17 million, while the cost to build Grove Street Commons is estimated at \$6.2 million, according to John Grado, city engineer and director of community and economic development, citing figures from the 2012 Williamsport Housing Strategy.

At Memorial Homes, workers with NRP Contracting of Cleveland, Ohio, are on track to complete construction by year's end, Grado said.

The siding will be a mixture of colors, said Joseph Gerardi, city codes administrator. "It will be broken up, gray and other colors, that hopefully look nice," he said.

The future residents' safety is in mind with sprinkler systems, alarms linked to the city fire department and strobe lights for hearing impaired, Gerardi said.

The property will be managed by Arbor Housing and Development, of Bath, N.Y.

These are people who will pay taxes, vote, go to Williamsport Crosscutters' baseball games, pay for entry to the new swimming pool, send their children to schools, shop at stores and may even contribute to their government by joining committees or running for office, Allison said.

"I think with Memorial Park and Susquehanna Bank Park at Bowman Field nearby and a new pool coming in, it will be attractive for the new residents," he said.

Much of the improvements happened because of the Marcellus Shale gas drilling industry, according to the investment portfolio.

The city received a state Department of Community and Economic Development industrial site reuse program grant of \$975,000 to demolish and remediate the warehouse site. It also received a \$500,000 grant, which was matched with \$200,000 in county natural gas impact fees and \$300,000 in city community development block funds, bringing the total for street improvements in that neighborhood to \$1 million, Grado said.

"We are currently under final design for the street improvements in the neighborhood," Grado said. That work should begin in coming months and continue through next year. Residents can expect to see new sidewalks, curbs, trees, lights and access for handicapped, he said.

Contractors working on behalf of STEP Inc. also are involved in several types of home improvements in the neighborhood.

The county provided natural gas impact fees and the city used \$100,000 of its impact fees and \$360,000 of community development funds, and community development block grant funds sunk into the project, Grado said. "It includes street improvements," he said.

STEP and Habitat for Humanity are doing rehabilitation using state gas-related funds on owner-occupied housing.

Habitat for Humanity workers are making nearby properties sparkle with its "Brush With Kindness" program that gets new coats of paint on the buildings and improves the outside of the houses in the neighborhood, he said