

Housing plan could bring city \$16.5 million

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City Council Thursday night heard from Gary Silversmith, general counsel of P&L Government Solutions, a Washington, D.C.-based firm that wants to see the Brodart warehouse on Memorial Avenue razed, clean up from any chemicals or harmful contaminants and turned into an upscale townhouse complex.

The need for affordable and quality housing is at a premium as the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry ramps up.

Discussions with officials from Halliburton, Textron and other companies have taken place, according to Silversmith. They see the project in an urban residential neighborhood setting as an ideal location to live.

Council members Bill Hall, Liz Miele, Gerry Fausnaught and Randall J. Allison agreed to a memorandum of agreement that includes the company as partners along with the city Redevelopment Authority, Lycoming County Department of Planning and Development and Habitat for Humanity.

The 3.5-acre building at Memorial and Oliver Street is expected to be demolished, the land cleared from any chemicals by a process of remediation and the final product - 48 single-and-double bedroom apartments, nine townhouses and two single-family homes, the latter to be developed under authority of Habitat for Humanity.

"We're Brownfields investors," Silversmith said. Brownfields are former industrial sites that are cleaned up through remediation and converted back into viable residential, commercial or industrial properties.

P&L's plan is to purchase the property for \$1 from Brodart Co.

P&L Investments became a partner when, by chance, Bill Kelly, deputy director of county planning and development, said the department was invited to a national Brownfields convention in Philadelphia by officials from the state Department of Environmental Protection where they met with Silversmith.

"It's not Christmas but it looks like it," Kelly said of the serendipitous encounter with Silversmith, whose company is a pioneer in the field of remediation of former industrial sites.

After listening to the presentation, Allison said he hoped the project had a "snowball" effect on these neighborhoods. So, too, did Fausnaught, who described the city as regional in scope and appreciated Kelly and Brodart's cooperation on the redevelopment project.

The remediation work could occur early next year. Demolition work also could occur in 2012 or early 2013 followed by construction of the housing units.

The county planning office received a letter of intent to proceed with application with the Department of Community and Economic Development.

The residential investment could bring the city \$16.5 million from its 90 construction jobs and the expected "ripple effect" of other jobs related to the residential growth, not to mention the growth of the tax base.