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Habitat home planned for Cleveland Avenue

By Patrick McArdle

Staff Writer

A building lot at 42 Cleveland Ave. will be the site of the first home built in the city by the Habitat for Humanity of Rutland County as it works to rehabilitate the northwest neighborhood.

The city Board of Aldermen voted Monday to award the lot to the new iteration of the local chapter of Habitat.

The Habitat chapter is looking for a family partner to buy the home, which will be sold with a mortgage that will have no interest charges.

Like other Habitat homes, the Cleveland Avenue home will be built with volunteer labor, including contributions from the eventual owner.

The project was developed with the assistance of the Rutland Redevelopment Authority, Project VISION and NeighborWorks of Western Vermont.

The development of the project is related to a \$1.25 million grant announced locally by Gov. Peter Shumlin in 2014. About a dozen properties were redeveloped with the funding, four by demolishing and replacing a home and the rest by rehabilitating existing homes.

Dave Pearson, vice president of the Rutland Habitat's board of directors, said when the local habitat was revived about two years ago after several years of being idle, the northwest neighborhood was identified as "the primary target area, the area with the greatest opportunity for improvement and perhaps the greatest benefit for the community."

"Now we're in a position to take this property and put a single-family house on it," he said.

Pearson said he expects the family who will buy the home will be identified and then a plan will be made to build the right home for the family's needs. A Habitat family is low-income but must meet certain fiscal criteria to be sure they can afford to buy and maintain the home.

But Pearson said a fundraising effort, with a goal of about \$110,000, will be launched soon with a target of starting construction in the spring.

When the construction begins, the host family will be expected to put in about 200 hours of "sweat equity."

"We find that this helps to give the family a greater degree of ownership even though they're paying a mortgage, they take a great deal of pride in something they participated in themselves," Pearson said.

Brennan Duffy, executive director of the Rutland Redevelopment Authority, or RRA, said the home at 42 Cleveland Ave. had been destroyed by fire on Feb. 21, 2014, leaving "pretty much a shell."

The remains of the building sat vacant and unused for a period of time, Duffy said, until the grant funding from 2014 was used to acquire the property. NeighborWorks took the role of removing the building and leaving the property "pretty much a clean slate for the rebuild," Duffy added.

The Habitat chapter had shown an interest in working with the other agencies, according to Duffy, which tied in with the goal of not just removing blighted buildings but replacing them with new homes and returning them to the city's tax rolls.

Duffy said the construction of a new home can have a positive impact on the entire neighborhood.

"I think people do like to see things going on where things are improving in their neighborhood. It makes it look like a great place for them to continue investing in their own properties," he said. "That was really the goal of this whole revitalization initiative."

Duffy said as the partner organizations look to the successful use of the 2014 grant to redevelop almost a dozen properties, plans are being made to look at the next step and pursue new funding.

The Rutland-area Habitat celebrated the completion of its first project — since becoming active again about two years ago — when a home was completed in Fair Haven in October.

Information about applying for the Habitat home can be found on the group's website at www.rutlandhabitat.weebly.com or by calling 747-7440.

[patrick.mcardle @rutlandherald.com](mailto:patrick.mcardle@rutlandherald.com)
