

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Blighted building can be a showpiece

America's industrial past has left a legacy of huge multi-story brick factory buildings scattered in the residential neighborhoods of rust belt cities from Maine to Missouri.

Abandoned and neglected, many of these older buildings have fallen prey to vandals, squatters, and arsonists.

But developers with vision and financial resources have turned others into showpieces, such as the new Google office in Pittsburgh's 100-year-old Nabisco factory or loft apartments in the former RCA Victor "Nipper Building" along Camden's waterfront.

Now Genesis Housing Corp., a non-profit with a long history of housing rehabilitation in Pottstown, wants to breathe new life into the abandoned Fecera's furniture warehouse at Beech and Evans streets. Genesis is partnering with Housing Visions to create 43 moderate-rate apartments in the four-story building with an arts center operated by ArtFusion19464 on the ground floor.

Two adjacent parking lots will provide off-street spaces for 62 cars. Not ample, but adequate.

Realistically, it is hard to imagine a better future for this building. Very few developers have the capability to raise the \$13 million needed to properly renovate a huge 1912 warehouse. Using state tax credits means making the apartments "affordable,"

but Montgomery County's median income is so high that "affordable" by county standards is far from meager by Pottstown standards.

Genesis has pledged to retain and enhance the historic façade of the building, just as it did with the handsome Jefferson School Apartments at Beech and Warren streets, completed in 2004.

As a school board member, of course I am concerned with attracting more children to educate, but three-quarters of the apartments will be one-bedroom only.

I am reassured to know there will be on-site property management and maintenance. Moreover, Genesis

has a stellar track record for creating new and renovated housing in Pottstown stretching back 15 years.

ArtFusion19464 will find a permanent, ADA compliant home for its non-profit arts program after ten years of uncertainty on High Street.

To those who oppose the project, I ask: What's your alternative? Years of more blight, and possibly a massive fire like the one that destroyed the Doehler building adjacent to the library, leaving bare, roofless walls?

Genesis and Housing Visions have twice sought tax credits for this project in previous years and fallen short. Let's hope the community helps make their third effort successful.

Letters of support can be delivered to ArtFusion at 254 E. High Street or emailed to info@artfusion19464.org.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



For the third year in a row, Genesis Housing Corp. and Housing Visions are applying for state tax credits to rehabilitate the former Fecera's furniture warehouse on Beech Street into apartments and an arts center. The more community support they can generate for their \$12.7 million proposal, the more likely the project can move forward.