

# NEWCAP May Get Grants For Old Wausaukee School

Members of Wausaukee Village Board were delighted with new possibilities for demolition of the old Wausaukee School building and reclamation of the property on which it stands, presented by NEWCAP representatives Jamie Johnson and Tim Polzin at a 5 p.m. special meeting Wednesday, Jan. 6.

Winners of the Christmas Decoration contest will be formally announced at the next regular Village Board meeting, at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 13.

Johnson explained possibilities of federal grants to not only clean up the school property, but to build one or more new four-plex apartments on it for families needing moderate to low cost housing, possibly replace other damaged buildings in the village. They possibly could replace the existing low income housing four-plex with a totally new unit, and perhaps reclaim a property currently occupied by a burned-out house.

For several years the board has been seeking ways to get the old school building and its additions either torn down or remodeled into usable condition.

After hearing from the NEWCAP people the board put a "hold" on a proposed application for a Targeted Assessment Grant for site studies to determine if asbestos is or is not a problem. Wheels had previously been put in motion for condemnation of the property, which is owned by Chuck Edlebeck. Edlebeck has been stymied by environmental regulations in attempts to reuse some portions of the building and tear the rest of it down due to lack of documentation on the extent of the asbestos problem, if indeed there is one.

The NEWCAP representatives came to Wausaukee at the request of Ann Hartnell, a representative of the Wausaukee Economic Development Association and tireless worker in quest of a solution to the old school problem, which everyone seems to agree is an eyesore and a hazard.

Hartnell said Annette Weisbach of the Green Bay DNR office, aware of Wausaukee's problems with the school, suggested she contact the NEWCAP people in Oconto. Weisbach deals with contaminated soils for the DNR.

At the end of nearly an hour of discussion with the NEWCAP representatives at the Jan. 6 meeting, village board members were enthusiastic about the ideas proposed by Johnson and Polzin.

Before the meeting ended, the board promised, by unanimous vote, to give NEWCAP "all the support and material needed for demolition of the old school building."

Comments from board members indicated belief that Edlebeck also would support

the NEWCAP proposal.

In her explanation to the board, Johnson said before doing demolition or cleanup work on the property, NEWCAP would need clear title.

Johnson stated on Feb. 17, 2009 President Obama signed the Economic Stimulus Package, with a "Neighborhood Stabilization Program" as one of its components. That money allows nonprofit and governmental agencies to purchase foreclosed and/or abandon or blighted properties, which then can be demolished and reclaimed as sites for affordable housing units, green space and/or whatever else the Village may be looking for.

Johnson said when her staff came to the Village to look at a building on Tyler Street they noticed the condition of the old high school, and later approached their executive director about helping the Village with this particular situation.

Johnson she had a better understanding after reviewing Village minutes on the Website and finally the NEWCAP Director has agreed to allow her to submit an application to tear down the building and put up green space. NEWCAP would then deed the property to the Village, she said. She added that the Village could not sell the property to a "for profit" developer but could give it to a nonprofit developer.

Trustee Hilbert Radtke asked about giving the housing project to NEWCAP and letting them run it. Johnson said that as a community housing development organization, NEWCAP access to some funds that are set aside at the state level to build affordable housing units for low to moderate income people. Hartnell said the Village needs moderate income housing. Johnson stated the NEWCAP projects target housing for teachers, firemen, industrial workers, etc. Johnson said as a nonprofit organization they are exempt from paying property taxes but they do pay for utilities, and could pay an agreed upon amount to the village in lieu of taxes for services they would receive from the village.

Johnson said the whole project would include replacing the four-unit apartment building on Tyler Street as well as the old school building. Any time NEWCAP razes a building with multiple units they have to replace it with a comparable amount of units.

Village President Jeff Townsend mentioned that the old school property includes four lots, with the building on one and part of a second. He suggested acquiring all the lots so the Village could possibly put in a playground park or develop the remaining lots.

Townsend also talked about other properties within the village, particularly a burnt house. Johnson said NEWCAP would have to purchase these types of properties from a person or bank. Hartnell stated that the burnt house will be going to the county this summer for delinquent taxes, and Johnson said in that case NEWCAP would be able to purchase it through a land sale. She added the building could be razed and replaced with a single family home, but not a rental property.

Johnson stated there are four different ways to spend the stimulus package money:

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Acquisition, Rehab and Rental, Acquisition, Rehab and Resale, Demolition or Redevelopment. Johnson stated razing the old school and building new housing would be considered redevelopment. The burnt out house would be classified as demolition and acquisition, rehab and resale. Townsend pointed out the property would then go back on the tax roll.

Johnson said they could get a grant for this only if there is enough money in the pot. She said some stimulus money has gone to WEDA for loans to people who are going to be losing their property, but some of this money has been returned to the state and is again available to NEWCAP.

She added that there is an estimated \$357,000 left over, and said there are also incentive dollars available. The stimulus project must be over 75% completed in the year it started to be eligible for the incentive dollars, Johnson said. Because our 10-county region has completed at least 75 percent of its projects the door is opened for the additional \$2 million. Johnson said that she and Polzin expect to seek \$500,000 to raze the two buildings and put up a four-plex.

Townsend asked about asbestos, and Johnson said that will be a huge factor. She said that they would have to notify the contractors to bid stating that all asbestos and lead based paint will be removed, and this can be costly.

Johnson stated that there are several steps that need to be taken and these steps can run into snags along the way.

The first steps would be to submit a proposal to the State Department of Commerce, for which they would need to create a budget, get an appraisal, do a statutory checklist (flood plain, location, etc.), an environmental review (background of property), a historical review (because it is over 50 years old) and an archeological review. Trustee Kellen Stumbris asked for a projected date, and Johnson said it usually takes 4 months to get everything through. Applications must be in by Monday, Feb. 15. Johnson said the good thing is the application for this program isn't as difficult as some.

Once the funding is approved, NEWCAP has three years to get the work done, "but we don't plan to take that long," Johnson said. She added that the more projects they complete, the more grants the agency is eligible for. She said their only "profit" is money to pay salaries of people like Polzin, and a 7.5 percent administration fee. The state gets a 2.5 percent administration fee.

"If Chuck (Edlebeck) is on board with this, what are we waiting for?" asked Trustee Julie Parkansky after the explanations were over.

"This is so wonderful," marveled Townsend. He said the village badly needs more housing to attract more residents with children, which is what the school district needs. If the NEWCAP project becomes a reality both issues would be resolved.

Radtke made a motion, seconded by Parkansky to

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