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News

Community Health Center gets grant to expand in Middletown

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By JONETTA BADILLO
Press Staff

MIDDLETOWN — A \$400,000 grant from the state Department of Economic and Community Development will help expand the city's Community Health Center, creating about 100 jobs, town officials said.

"It's a win-win situation," state Sen. Len Suzio said. "It's making Middletown more economically active and also encouraging the revitalization of the downtown area."

Last week the state department announced it had awarded more than \$17 million in funding for various brownfield-related projects.

Middletown was just one of the nine municipalities on the list to receive a grant from the economic and community development department.

The state agency also distributed grants to areas like Berlin, Bridgeport, Derby, Enfield, Hartford, Stamford and Waterbury. Preston received financial assistance from both a grant and loan, totaling \$4.5 million, more than any municipality on the list.

According to William Warner, the director of Planning of Development, the city applied for state funding in order to acquire the property located at 645 Main St., which is currently occupied by a contaminated abandoned gas station, in the north end of Middletown.

Prior to completing the application, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection conducted testing at the site and discovered a significant amount of gasoline in the soil and in the ground water, Warner said. This finding made the city eligible to request for funds for property acquisition and remediation. With this money the Community Health Center will expand its services and be able to offer them at the new location.

"The state is serious about cleaning up contaminated properties in urban areas," Warner said. "So we've taken advantage of that."

The government has leveled the playing field so that people don't just purchase property on the outskirts in suburban areas, the director added.

Although the application was submitted in mid-October and the money has been given to the city this month to start the

process, it will be several months before anything is up and running, Warner said.

"It's a shovel ready site," he said, "which means it's ready for development."

But the project won't be completed until sometime in 2012, Warner said. The privately owned property will shortly be going out to bid, he said

Not only did the contamination call for its development, but in addition to that there has been roughly 10 or 11 talks about the new zoning regulations that states that the station, built back in the 1940s, is not allowed at its Main Street address anymore, Warner said.

One of the main purposes in developing this property, Warner said, is to "bring back consistency in building design."

The vacant station will soon be transformed into a multi-story building, matching the building design of other structures along Main Street.

State Rep. Matt Lesser, D-100, said "it's terrific" that the brownfield funding will go toward the expansion of the Community Health Center.

"I learned about the news last week and gave my congrats to Mayor Drew and Planning Director Bill Warner," Lesser said Tuesday night.

State Rep. Joseph Serra, D-33, currently represents the section of Middletown in which the brownfield site is located, but the General Assembly's Reapportionment Commission approved for its redistricting into the 100th House District.

Serra did not return phone call from the Press seeking comment.

The building design for the health center addition will consist of retail on the first level and offices on the second and third levels, Warner said.

"We've been working on revitalizing Main Street for the last 15 to 20 years," he said.

And the development of this site will definitely bring in more jobs; however, Warner said, some jobs will be permanent while positions mainly dealing with construction will only be temporary.

"The city and the chamber worked very hard to get this money which will enable job creation and economic growth on the north end of Main Street," Mayor Dan Drew said Wednesday.

Jonetta Badillo can be reached by email at jbadillo@middletownpress.com

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