

HOUSING HOPES: Groundbreaking ceremony held for renovations of Linden Avenue property

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A large crowd was on hand on Linden Avenue Wednesday as officials from the City of Sanford and many other organizations held a groundbreaking to mark renovations to a vacant, boarded-up property which will become affordable housing units.

The property, located at 226 Linden Ave., is in the process of undergoing a major facelift. In addition to the city, the Sanford Housing Authority, S3 Housing Connect, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Central Carolina Strategic Developers, N.C. Department of Commerce, North Carolina Housing Finance Agency, Progressive Contracting Company Inc., and Stogner Architecture are involved with the redesign and renovations to the property.

The project stems from a variety of grants and loans obtained by the city and the Sanford Housing authority including a N.C. Department of Commerce grant of \$750,000 from the CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization Program and a \$440,000 forgivable loan from the Supportive Housing Development Loan Program of the N.C. Housing Finance Agency.

Officials said the goal is to create five permanent, quality, affordable housing units that will be available for families who fall below 50% of the area's median income as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Linden Avenue structure will house four one-bedroom units and one two-bedroom unit. Each unit will have its own entrance and living space.

“This is good news for our community,” said Sanford Housing Authority Chair Hope White. “This is good news for our residents. This is good news for everybody here that is connected with it.”

White acknowledged the staff of not only the Sanford Housing Authority, but all of those who are assisting with the project.

Sanford City Councilman Byron Buckels, SHA board liaison and mayor pro-tem, read scriptures and offered an invocation.

“It is important that we as leaders, we as city officials, CEOs, city managers, we as a community and we as the people do not lose our community and our compassion for those who are disenfranchised, for those who are misplaced, for those who are broken-hearted and for those who are in need of affordable housing,” he said. “Today really serves as a prime example of how we can find practical solutions to real problems. Problems that are not only facing our city and our county, but problems that are facing our country as a whole.”

Mayor Chet Mann said he was speaking from the heart as he discussed the project and the mission of the groups involved. He described the Sanford community as an “ecosystem.”

“To have a vibrant community, you have to be connected,” he said. “To be connected, you can’t have some that have and some that have not, you have to be able to connect everybody. The ecosystem starts with the shelters and the transitional housing, then the affordable housing and the market rate housing. The ecosystem involves the city, the Sanford Housing Authority, the county. There are no borders in projects like this.”

Mann said the ecosystem he described is “alive and well, and it’s growing.” He spoke about the beginnings of Sanford’s response to homelessness in 2017.

“We had no coordinated response,” he said. “We had a few people working in different areas to do things like this, but nobody was working together.”

Those discussions led to the formation of the S3 Housing Connect Task Force, which now includes more than 40 people. He then thanked all involved for their efforts to come together to make the project possible.

“It became one of the most rewarding things we’ve done,” Mann said. “It has really grown and blossomed.”

Shannon Judd, CEO of the Sanford Housing authority, spoke about the project. She offered thanks to the Sanford Housing Authority Board, staff and all who were involved. She spoke about doing a similar project in Durham and realized Sanford needed a project like the one that is underway.

“When I arrived at the Sanford Housing Authority and realized that there wasn’t permanent housing for homeless families, there were two things that I wanted to do,” Judd said. “One of them I could do immediately. That was to create homeless preferences for both our public housing and our housing choice voucher program. In 2015, I implemented those preferences. The next thing was to emulate the vision that I needed, bringing to fruition in Durham for homeless families — so here we are with 226 Linden Avenue. Hopefully, this is Phase 1 of a two-phase project for homeless families.”

Robert Hughes, S3 Connect Housing Committee chair, echoed the sentiments.

“It’s been great to see the fruition of projects like this,” he said.

He added that other communities had fallen behind in providing affordable housing and that Sanford was aware and taking action. He also praised the partnerships involved.

“Support, awareness and partnerships is what we need in Lee County,” he said. “With S3, I think we’re achieving this.”

SHA Development Manager Bridgette Stephens also praised the teamwork in the project.

“Partnerships will be even more important for the success of 226 Linden Avenue even after the paint is dry and the new residents have moved in,” she said. “This will help us achieve our goal of providing permanent, quality, affordable housing for the five families.”

Construction on the project is slated to be completed in April.







