



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAYETTE CITY TACKLING BLIGHT, REVITALIZING COMMUNITY

Uniontown, PA - Fayette City Borough started spring cleaning early this year, with the demolition of three long-blighted properties.

Borough council members partnered with the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, PA (RACF) and Fayette County Commissioners Dave Lohr, chairman; Vince Vicites and Scott Dunn, to use county land bank powers for the project. As a result, 239, 308 and 312 Main St. along the borough's main thoroughfare are now level, vacant lots, primed for new purposes.

RACF Executive Director Andrew French said all of the properties were "abandoned, blighted and condemned" when moving through the county's Upset Tax Sale.

"In partnership with Fayette City Borough, the redevelopment authority submitted a priority bid at the 2022 Judicial Sale to gain possession of the properties, with the intention of putting them out to bid for demolition," French said. "The property was important to Fayette City, because they have had to deal with these blighted structures for an extended period of time. Obviously, the county and the redevelopment authority were willing to help, because it furthered our work to help eliminate blighted structures and strengthen our local communities."

Council Vice President Dianna Vargo said one of the properties had a storied history; having housed the mayor's office in its heyday, before becoming an apartment complex and changing ownership many times over several decades.

"That building was just a mess, and we had to have it condemned, because the sewage was openly flowing under the building," she said. "The inspector said it was literally caving in on itself and the facade started falling onto the sidewalk, which is when it really became dangerous. That's when we contacted the commissioners."

Vargo, whose husband, Mayor Herb Vargo, owns a business along Main Street, said the long-awaited demolitions "mean more to us than I can ever tell you."

"The whole town is so excited, so happy. The residents are starting to think, 'Wow. Our town is starting to become normal again,'" she said. "What got me the most was that I would tell people we were finally doing this, and they wouldn't believe me. When it all started happening, everyone was so shocked and excited about the progress."

Prior to demolition, Vargo said, the buildings were blighted for about five years, as the property owners repeatedly failed to fix the failing structures.

"Everybody kept buying these properties, but nobody did anything with them. That happens to a lot of buildings around here. The owners don't want them torn down because of sentimental value. Maybe it was their family home growing up, but if they can't maintain them, things just get worse over time,"

Vargo said. "It took us a little while to get it done, but Andrew really helped us a lot. Once the county came in, he took control. Now they're all nice, level lots that somebody might want to use someday."

French said the Fayette City project was completed through the county's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, as well as Fayette's Demolition Program, which is funded through the county's Act 152 Demolition Fund and the Local Share Account (LSA) Program.

"We've been demolishing properties since the inception of the redevelopment authority, so literally thousands have been demolished over the years," French said. "We budget funding annually for demolition through all three funding sources."

Similar county demolition projects were either recently completed or are ongoing currently in Masontown, Brownsville and Point Marion boroughs, and Saltlick and Georges townships.

As for Fayette City, Vargo said the demolitions are a "fresh start" and people are expressing interest in the now-vacant lots and helping to revitalize the borough.

"We're going to have a meeting to discuss the future of these properties, but for right now, we're just happy that it's done and no longer an eyesore. It's not dangerous to walk down Main Street anymore, and that was our biggest concern," Vargo said. "We don't know what's going to happen yet, but we're excited for the future."

To learn more about the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, PA (RACF), visit www.racfpa.org.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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