

NEWS

MOMENTUM BUILDS IN WEST LYNN

BY GAYLA CAWLEY | September 24, 2020



A rendering of the townhomes that LHAND will build at 870 Western Ave.

LYNN — A former brownfield site on Western Avenue will start to be developed into residential housing next month.

Neighborhood Development Associates, the development arm of Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development (LHAND), plans to build six attached townhomes at 870 Western Ave.

Two of the two-bedroom homes will be set aside for first-time homebuyers, and will have an affordable component. The other four townhouse units will be listed as market-rate, and are expected to cost between \$350,000 to \$375,000, according to Peggy Phelps, director of planning and development for LHAND.

The project, which was approved by the City Council on Tuesday night, is the fourth phase in the non-profit housing agency's \$6 million redevelopment of a West Lynn neighborhood referred to as Orchard Grove.

Unlike the first three phases of the project, which involved transforming vacant General Electric Company lots into 20 single-family townhouses, the fourth phase involves redeveloping a former contaminated lot, which last housed a gas station 20 years ago and was cleaned up with a federal grant.

"With all of the excitement of the large-scale developments on the waterfront and the downtown, oftentimes investments in our inner neighborhoods seem overlooked," said Charles Gaeta, LHAND executive director.

"However, this development of townhouses on one of Lynn's main corridors will enhance our ongoing investment in the Orchard Grove Neighborhood. These smaller infill projects eliminate empty blighted land and re-energize the neighborhood and the opportunity for homeownership will further the stability and vested interest in the community."

When construction kicks off next month, it will cap a multi-year collaborative process among the city, Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC/Lynn), LHAND, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and residents of the neighborhood, said EDIC/Lynn Executive Director James Cowdell.

The process started with the City Council taking ownership of the land for the former owner's non-payment of taxes (the city seized the abandoned station for non-payment of \$2,296 in real estate taxes in 2012), said Cowdell, explaining that the council turned the contaminated land over to EDIC/Lynn in 2015 for clean-up.

From there, EDIC applied for and received a \$200,000 federal grant from the EPA, which paid for a clean-up of the site over the course of a two-year period, which involved removing the contamination, such as petroleum and underground oil tanks, Cowdell said.

As a result, the site was deemed suitable for residential housing, and turned over to NDA for \$1. Before the agreement with LHAND, EDIC/Lynn had made two attempts to sell the property, but failed to receive any attractive bids, including a marijuana dispensary.

Development plans for the site were decided upon following a neighborhood meeting hosted by former Ward 6 Councilor, and now state Rep. Peter Capano (D-Lynn), where residents said they preferred housing.

"We're taking a blighted contaminated lot and putting it into a fantastic finished product which is six townhouses," said Cowdell.

Current Ward 6 Councilor Fred Hogan, who picked up where his predecessor left off in terms of working with Phelps to address the concerns of residents who live in the neighborhood, said it will be exciting to get some new families in his ward.

“Two of the six townhouses are going to be dedicated for first-time home buyers,” said Hogan. “Just keeping people in our ward and (giving) first-time home buyers the opportunity to purchase two of those units is going to be great.”

Providing an affordable component to the Orchard Grove neighborhood redevelopment project has been part of all four phases, said Phelps. For the first phase, two of the four townhomes built on Minot Street were set aside for first-time home buyers, which was also the case for half of the four homes built on Richard Street during the second phase.

The third phase, expected to be completed in March, will result in 12 townhomes at River and Burns streets. The fourth phase, involving the former gas station property, is scheduled for completion in late spring, Phelps said.

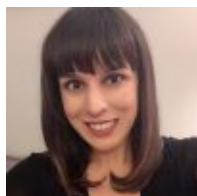
The redevelopment of the Orchard Grove neighborhood, from Oakville to Minot and Bennett streets to Western Avenue, began in 2018. Phelps has said that LHAND became interested in the abandoned gas station site because it was located in the same neighborhood where the agency had been transforming vacant GE parcels.

At this time, there are no other phases planned for the project, but Phelps hopes that will change soon.

“I think that the neighborhood has improved immensely,” said Phelps. “We’d like to go back and renegotiate with GE. There’s some other parcels in the neighborhood we would like to acquire. At the time, GE wasn’t ready to sell those.”

According to the Southern Essex Registry of Deeds, the Western Avenue property’s history dates back to 1988, when the Lynn J. Robert Corp. of Peabody and Jerome Sousa of North Hampton, N.H., acquired the 12,288-square-foot lot at no cost.

Gayla Cawley can be reached at gcawley@itemlive.com. Follow her on Twitter @GaylaCawley.



Gayla Cawley

Gayla Cawley joined The Daily Item as a reporter in 2015. The University of Connecticut graduate studied English and Journalism. Follow her on Twitter [@GaylaCawley](https://twitter.com/GaylaCawley).

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