

Grant completes funding puzzle for Lee renovation

[By Dick Lindsay, Berkshire Eagle Staff](#)

Posted: 12/19/2011 12:23:20 AM EST

Updated: 12/19/2011 12:01:21 PM EST

Monday December 19, 2011

LEE -- A regional housing agency has secured a \$481,000 state grant, the final piece of funding for a \$2.7 million downtown housing rehabilitation project expected to start early next year.

Berkshire Housing Development Corp., through the town of Lee, recently received the grant from the Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant program.

The latest award, coupled with other state grants and private loans received earlier this year, completes the financial puzzle toward renovation of the Consolati building at 57 Main St., according to BHDC President Elton Ogden.

BHDC plans an extreme makeover for the 16 one- and two- bedroom apartments in the upper two floors of the building, which currently are home to 32 people, and maintain them as affordable apartments. The first floor commercial space will continue to be occupied by Country Lady Antiques and Gifts, the Upstairs Basement consignment shop, and Lee Power Equipment.

While actual renovation of the rental units is likely by March at the latest, Ogden noted, some improvements benefiting the entire three-story structure are already underway.

"We're moving ahead with interim work such as new fire alarms, lighting and the installation of a highly efficient natural gas [heating system]," Ogden said.

He added, Berkshire Housing is working with Western Massachusetts Electric Co., Berkshire Gas Co. and Berkshire Community Action Council for energy subsidies

Advertisement

and rebates that will benefit the tenants.

Local and state officials view the housing project as crucial to Lee's downtown revitalization effort.

"It's just another piece to downtown planning," said Richard Vinette, executive director for the Lee Community Development Corp.

State Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli, D-Lenox said the state grant shows the Patrick Administration is committed to helping Baystate cities and towns improve themselves.

"We have seen very strong economic activity occurring in [Lee's downtown] with businesses moving in and buildings renovated, which has contributed to the overall vitality of the town," Pignatelli said.

The Consolati building will be the second Main Street block to undergo extensive renovation as part of a rejuvenated downtown Lee. In June, local businessman Michael McManmon completed a \$3.7 million restoration of the Baird & Benton block at 40-50 Main St. The project created classrooms and office space in the upper two floors -- vacant more than 50 years -- for McManmon's Lee-based College Internship Program. The first floor remained commercial space that includes a cafe, tanning salon and manicure shop.

In addition, the town this spring built a new parking lot behind the Baird and Benton block to attract more visitors downtown and several new businesses have opened on Main Street the past two years.

To reach Dick Lindsay:
rlindsay@berkshireeagle.com,
or (413) 496-6233.