

Canton awards \$1.3 million to southeast health center, grocery



Kelly Byer

The Repository

CANTON – The city has awarded \$1.3 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to Canton For All People for a southeast health center and grocery.

Mayor Thomas Bernabei told council members Monday that the money would help renovate the former Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority building at 1318 Gonder Ave. SE, which has been vacant for more than eight years. Renovations are expected to cost \$1.66 million with another \$100,000 for medical equipment and \$100,000 for grocery equipment.



"To me, this'll be one of the best additions we have done since the southeast community center," Bernabei said.

More: Nonprofit leaders discuss southeast Canton market plans

Planning for a southeast health clinic began in 2016 with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Philadelphia-based Reinvestment Fund as part of an Invest Health initiative. Initially, the city planned to locate the health center at the Edward "Peel" Coleman Community Center. StarkFresh had plans to lease the SMHA building for a supermarket, but the two plans converged and evolved.

Canton For All People, a community development corporation formed by Crossroads United Methodist Church, purchased the Gonder Avenue building earlier this year. About half of the building will be leased by My Community Health Center, which will start by offering primary care services, and the other half will be a grocery and food pantry operated by Canton For All People, StarkFresh and other community partners.

"There's still a little bit of undeveloped space in there that, in the future, we hope to put a dental clinic back there or some other kind of use that the community deems fit," Don Ackerman, executive director of Canton For All People, told The Canton Repository.

There are a few outstanding commitments from area charitable foundations, but the city's grant provided the nonprofit with enough money to start construction next month. Ackerman said work might be done as early as October 2023.

Councilwoman Chris Smith, D-4, said the project is the culmination of years of planning and asked for council members' support before Monday's vote. The grant was approved with no opposition.

"It's something that is greatly needed in the southeast area," Smith said.

Other action

- Approved a cooperative tax increment financing (TIF) agreement with the Stark County Port Authority, Hall of Fame Resort and Entertainment Company and HOF Village Newco LLC. The TIF was established in 2015 and provides a property tax exemption for development projects at the Village, which makes service payments in lieu of taxes. Canton City and Plain Local school districts divide 25% of the payments and the other 75% goes toward public infrastructure improvements in the area. Monday's agreement will allow the port authority to issue about \$20 million in TIF revenue bonds, which will be used to pay off previous bonds and fund infrastructure work. Councilman Greg Hawk, D-1, was absent for the vote, which received approval by the 10 other members. Councilman Frank Morris, D-9, cast the only vote in opposition and said after the meeting that he doesn't think the city benefits from offering TIFs to private developers.
- Authorized the mayor or public service director to purchase the walk-in cooler installed by Jerzee's Cafe to accommodate busy weekend business. The \$64,014 cooler will be paid for by \$16,176 collected from an additional tax on sales, parking or admission in the Centennial Plaza Tourism Development District and an advance of \$47,837 from the city's general fund. Revenue from the tourism development district is expected to repay the general fund. Morris was the only council member to oppose the measure, saying the city's \$12.3 million plaza should've been better equipped when it was built.

Reach Kelly at 330-580-8323 or kelly.byer@cantonrep.com On Twitter: @kbyerREP

<https://www.cantonrep.com/story/news/local/canton/2022/11/29/city-awards-1-3m-to-canton-for-all-people-health-center-grocery/69674994007/>