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DEVELOPMENT

Partners pursue senior housing on the East Side

People Inc., Mt. Olive Church seeking approval, financing to build 65 units

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NEWS BUSINESS REPORTER

The region's largest nonprofit social services agency and one of its most prominent East Side churches are teaming up for an affordable senior housing project that will create 65 apartments adjacent to the church.

People Inc. and the Mt. Olive Baptist Church want to construct a three-story complex for lower-income seniors that will eventually be owned and run by the church's nonprofit development arm. It will be open to anyone age 55 and up who qualifies by income, and is not limited to church members.

The project, called Mt. Olive Senior Manor, would represent the latest example of community development by Mt. Olive and other Black churches in the city. And, if completed, it would fulfill a dream that the church's longtime pastor, the Rev. William Gillison, has had for decades.

"Once this is up and operating, it's not only going to change the area that we're operating in, but I think it's going to have a tremendous impact beyond," Gillison said. "We've got to do a better job taking care of the generations that come before us, and that's not just the church but society. Mt. Olive Senior Manor is only a part of our effort to try to do something."

But first the partners have to line up city approvals and financing, which is expected to start this month.

Under plans by the developers and Silvestri Architects PC, the \$24 million project will feature a U-shaped building, actually two rectangular buildings with a connector at one end, with 61 one-bedroom apartments and four two-bedroom units.

All are aimed at tenants whose household incomes are no more than 50% to 60% of the area median. That means a range of \$16,350 to \$37,260, depending on the unit and the number of people in the household.

Fifteen units are designated for frail and elderly people. Eight units will be completely handicapped-accessible, while four will be set aside for the visual- or hearing-impaired.

The church is located at 703 E. Delavan Ave., but the project will be located just to the south on Sheridan Avenue, now renamed Mt. Olive Way. It will be separate from the church, and will eventually carry its own address.

The project will use the same brick as the church, and will also incorporate a faceted glass window in a bump-out at the front entrance, similar to the stained glass in the church.

Officials plan to submit their proposal this month for review by the city Zoning Board of Appeals, the project requires a variance because of its width, and by the Planning Board. If approved by the city and the funding sources, general contractor CSS Construction can start work in July 2022, with completion 18 months later, in early 2024.

The partners plan to apply to New York State Homes and Community Renewal in April or May for low-income housing tax credits and a Housing Trust Fund loan, and would also seek federal HOME funds through the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency. The team is also seeking funds from the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to cover the cost of the 15 units for frail and elderly seniors, as well as the New York State Energy Research and Development Agency.