

State approves \$7.75 million for CPTV center, other Norwalk projects

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Photo: Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Part of the old Washington Village public housing complex that is set for demolition Wednesday, July 25, 2018, in Norwalk, Conn. The State Bond Commission on Wednesday likely approved nearly \$8 million for Norwalk projects, including \$6 million for the second phase of the Washington Village Transformation Plan.

NORWALK — Connecticut Public Television’s plan to create an innovation and tech center on Wall Street got a \$1.5 million boost from the State Bond Commission on Wednesday.

“We are delighted that the State of Connecticut continues to support our

statewide educational initiatives and are truly grateful to (state) Senator Bob Duff for championing our efforts in Norwalk, an area of growth for Connecticut Public Television and Radio,” Connecticut Public Broadcasting President and CEO Jerry Franklin said in a statement.

“We are striving to create another innovative learning center with the Norwalk Public Schools, which will train high school students and veterans in the field of journalism, digital media, project management and life skills. When we first approached Senator Duff two years ago, he immediately embraced this idea and has become our chief advocate,” Franklin continued.

The facility would be Connecticut’s first digital-themed business incubation center for startups and digital entrepreneurs and serve six to 10 businesses a year. Duff described the proposed center as an exciting project that will serve as a creative hub where “community organizations and businesses can share ideas and resources to grow their fledgling businesses.”

At the same time, the location of the tech center remains up on the air.

“One of the things we’ll be doing is looking to identify a site to determine a location that best matches what they (CPTV) want to do with available space, but it will not be the Fairfield County Bank,” said Duff, D-Norwalk.

In fall 2016, the PBS affiliate’s parent submitted to Norwalk Building officials plans for a 15,000-square-foot “Connecticut Public Broadcasting Norwalk Innovation and Tech Center” at 67-90 Wall St. The property, home to Fairfield County Savings Bank, was recently purchased by local real estate broker Jason Milligan.

Train station study

In other business, the State Bond Commission also approved Wednesday \$250,000 to study the feasibility of bringing a train station back to the Wall Street area.

“Doing a feasibility study is important first step in the long-term development of the Wall Street area,” state Rep. Chris Perone, D-Norwalk, said in the press statement. “Increasing transportation options will encourage residential and retail growth in the area.”

During the first part of the 20th century, a train station serving the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad operated from 47 Wall St. The push to open a new station comes amid ongoing apartment construction in the Wall Street and West Avenue neighborhoods.

For South Norwalk, the State Bond Commission approved Wednesday \$6 million for phase two of the Washington Village Transformation Plan. The money will help finance a new 85-unit building on the south side of Raymond Street, between Day and Water streets.

\$6M for Washington Village

The Norwalk Housing Authority and Boston-based developer Trinity Financial are rebuilding Washington Village under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Choice Neighborhoods Program. The goal of the program is to build high-quality, mixed-income housing, provide children and families with educational and other services, and to spur public and private investment.

“It’s an important component to the overall funding and we’re glad that they’ve done it quickly,” Housing Authority Executive Director Adam Bovilsky said of the \$6 million approved by the Bond Commission.

Four-percent Low-Income Housing Tax Credits will support construction of 42 units with 10 market rate units and 32 units for households earning up to 60 percent of the area median income. Nine-percent Low-Income Housing Tax Credits will help build 43 units, with 10 market-rate units and 33 units for households earning up to 60 percent of area median income, Duff’s office said.

“The redevelopment of Washington Village is great news for the neighborhood and the city,” Duff said. “Quality affordable housing and the renovation of nearby Ryan Park are important efforts to benefit neighborhood residents.”

Money for Darien, Stamford

Norwalk wasn't the only city that received funding through the State Bond Commission on Wednesday.

Old Town Hall Houses, an affordable housing community for seniors in Darien, received \$6 million to assist with the demolition and new construction of 55 affordable elderly rental units. The new, modern units will include handicap-accessible upgrades and elevators.

Stamford got a big boost from the State Bond Commission on Wednesday, with \$8.4 million approved for projects in the City That Works.

Professional services giant KPMG was granted a \$3 million loan to assist with a Stamford expansion that will retain 546 jobs and create up to 110 new positions within four years, while \$2 million was awarded for the completion of improvements to Veterans Park, and \$1.2 million was earmarked for a roof replacement at the Rich Forum and new seating-and-aisle lighting at the Palace Theatre.

“Stamford is a hub of economic and civic activity. I'm happy the Bond Commission recognizes that and eases the burden on local taxpayers by underwriting the cost of these local improvements,” said state Sen. Carlo Leone, D-Stamford, in a news release. “I'm especially happy the state will pay to finish the redesign of Veterans Park, which is a project that I and others have been working on for several years ... it will serve as a reminder every day of the contributions of America's vets.”

The commission also provided funding to expand the Port of New Haven,

make improvements to Discovery and Barnum museums in Bridgeport and Stern Village in Trumbull.

Smaller city projects to move ahead with bond funding include \$850,000 to the Stamford Charter School for Excellence and \$823,000 to Optimus Health, both for renovations. The Boys and Girls Club at the Yerwood Center was granted \$255,000 to install an elevator, and Rippowam Middle School and Westhill High were awarded \$243,000 “to address building and site deficiencies,” the release said.

Bill Cummings contributed to this report.