

\$50M complex breaks ground in West Phila.

Michael D'Onofrio Tribune Staff Writer - Feb 17, 2018



City and state leaders, including Gov. Tom Wolf, center, were among those to participate in the groundbreaking of New Market West, a retail and community services complex at Market and 59th streets on Friday. — Tribune Photos Michael D'Onofrio



The New Market West development will replace a vacant and unused lot on Market and 59th streets, where tires, tarps and other garbage are currently piled. Elsewhere on the property is a parking lot, and vacant house and gas station.

Gov. Tom Wolf speaks at the groundbreaking ceremony for the New Market West development on Friday.

It's a new day on Market Street in West Philadelphia.

Two nonprofit organizations embarked Friday on a nearly \$50 million project to build a four-story community services and retail complex on an underutilized and vacant city block at 59th and Market streets.

The project, New Market West, will create 137,700-square-feet of space in a building spread across the 1.5 acre property. Currently a garbage-strewn lot with a parking lot, an abandoned house and gas station occupy the space.

The complex will provide space for early childhood education, workforce development, and educational, emergency, behavioral health services. A second phase of the project is expected to construct more than 40 units of affordable housing in a separate building, which will cost an additional \$15 million.

The joint venture between Mission First Housing Group, which develops and manages affordable housing projects, and Horizon House, which provides community-oriented services, broke ground on Friday during a ceremony that which was attended by Gov. Tom Wolf, and city and state representatives.

The project will have an “outsized impact on this community” and “turn this vacant lot into something that is actually a prize of the community, a centerpiece,” Wolf said as he spoke to the gathering over the noise of passing El trains chugging along on the Market-Frankford Line.

State Sen. Vincent Hughes (D-7) characterized the groundbreaking as a “significant moment” that will “transform this neighborhood.”

The area has struggled and suffered from a lack of investment for years, said Councilman Curtis Jones Jr. (4)

Jones noted that although SEPTA’s renovation of the Market Street elevated train was necessary, the decade worth of construction resulted in numerous businesses closures that still affect the area today.

But the new project’s will revitalize the area, Jones predicted.

“We’ve turned a corner. We’ve planted our flag today: That our vision for our New Market West is here,” Jones said.

Jeffrey Wilush, president and CEO of Horizon House, said the organization will move its offices from its current location at 120 S. 30th St. to New Market West, along with upwards of 300 staff members. Wilush added that many of the clients Horizon House serves already live in Haddington and Cobbs Creek.

“We were looking for a community to move into,” Wilush said. “A community where we could provide services, provide some economic uplift, and help be part of revitalization.”

Additional committed tenants complex include Montgomery Early Learning Center and ACHIEVEability, an organization that supports home-ownership for low-income, single parents and the homeless.

The property on Market Street is bordered by 59th and Salford streets. The building’s top floors will feature upwards of 90,000-square-feet of office space and a rooftop green space; retail stores will be at street-level. There will also be approximately 80 parking spaces located in an underground parking lot. Outside, there will be a piazza as well.

Officials estimate that the project will create 120 temporary jobs during construction, and create nearly 100 full-time jobs. The project will benefit from a \$5 million state grant and \$10.5 million in state tax credits.

The first phase of the project is expected to be completed by the fall of 2019.

The developers continue to seek financing for the second phase of the project, which includes a second building for affordable housing units. The second phases will cost an estimated \$15 million.

Alfredo de la Pena, CEO of Mission First Housing Group, said the project's location — just steps away from 60th Street Station — was invaluable, and the property will be spared from any future gentrification.

“The opportunity was to do something that would be an asset for the community and ... to preserve what we are doing here for the community,” Pena said. “It's to build an asset for a community that was a little bit forgotten.”

Among those at the ceremony were community members who had varying opinions about the project.

Longtime resident Kathryn Huggins, 71, supported the project, adding that the block has been an “eyesore” for decades.

“I'm glad they are doing something with it and making the community look like it used to,” Huggins said. “There used to be businesses and everything. When SEPTA came in here [to rebuild the elevated train line] it made the neighborhood go down.”

But Lowell Wilson, 43, was skeptical of the project's promises. Although he supported the project overall, he was taking a wait-and-see approach to determine whether those in the neighborhood will see any benefits.

“I think it's good for the community if it's going to actually support jobs for the community,” Wilson said. “I'll have to see what it actually provides.”

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