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Three apartment proposals presented

By PENNY RIORDAN, Staff Writer

NEW BRITAIN -- The Board of Commissioners of the city's Housing Authority heard from three regional developers Monday night on their plans for the vacant Corbin West property, all of which called for some form of affordable senior housing.

The three developers all proposed either affordable senior housing or assisted living developments with rents between \$700 and \$900. The companies courting the authority for the little more than two acres that once was Corbin West presented their plans to the board at a public hearing Monday.

A few residents from the Corbin Avenue neighborhood, who were present at the meeting, said they were impressed with the quality of the proposals.

"It was a surprise to me. I thought they were going to put up more lower-income housing like Corbin Heights," said Dorothy Puzewski, who has lived on Corbin Avenue for 44 years.

Puzewski and neighbors Nancy and Roger Roberge, who have lived in the area for 33 years, have seen the area around Corbin Avenue decline as a result of the deteriorating buildings.

"We didn't want something that would last just 25 years like Corbin Heights," Roberge said.

The Corbin West property, on the corner of Horse Plain Road and Corbin Avenue, was once home to public housing.

Local developer Anthony Bianca Jr., a partner with Great Northern Realty, was involved in the construction of the buildings in 1970. The company owned it for 17 years before selling it to a private developer, who eventually turned it over to the housing authority.

"I'd like to take back this property," Bianca said to the board. "I'd like to build this building and do something good for my old neighborhood I can be proud of."

The company proposed an up-to-five-story-high apartment building containing a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units for seniors or Section 8 voucher holders. The first floor would have room for 10,000 square feet of retail and office space. Great Northern Realty expects to have roughly 60 units available for rent.

Another developer with ties to the city and the Housing Authority, Castle Development Group, proposed to construct 58 affordable senior housing units in a two- to three-story building.

"We want this building to be community friendly, to work with the area neighbors and businesses to enhance the quality of life," said Douglas Bushman, vice president of Castle and a former authority employee.

The third proposal came from the Community Renewal Team (CRT) in Hartford, which proposed between 70 and 80 assisted-living units with community services such as food and health care right on the property.

"We believe there is a real opportunity to serve the need here in New Britain with this building," said Paul Puzzo, president of CRT.

The redevelopment of Corbin West has been part of an existing authority plan to generate revenue. The authority still owes the federal Department of Housing Urban Development for federal money it used to manage the crumbling state properties before they were transferred out of the authority's possession in February.

Because all three of the developments provide a similar type of housing, the board will take into consideration the financial aspects of the plans as well as what building is the best for the land, board chairman Michael Carrier said.

"The plans we saw tonight all seemed to fit really well into a neighborhood," he said.

A decision will most likely be made some time in January, Carrier said.

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