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## Renovation plans begin on Parkesburg School

PARKESBURG - Frances Hery walked slowly around her old stomping ground, the former Parkesburg School.

Shaking her head, the 1947 graduate looked up at the dilapidated building, at the broken glass windows, the chipped and peeling paint, the graffiti.

"I'd like to see it fixed up," said Hery, who now lives less than two blocks away from the Strasburg Avenue school. "It's a shame to see such a beautiful building in the condition it is now. There's a lot of litter and trash, bottles and cans and paper."

If all plans pass as proposed, Hery's hopes may be realized.

Progressive Investment Companies of Lancaster earlier this month signed an agreement of sale to renovate the 92-year-old school building for 27 senior citizen units and create three other buildings on the school's four-acre site to accommodate 60 other units. The school had previously been owned by Dr. Norman M. Warner.

According to Mayor William E. Wilson, plans for work to the school, constructed in 1900 and closed in 1980, are still in the early stages.

"Everything is very preliminary," said Wilson, who himself late last year had plans to purchase the building. "They only signed the agreement to purchase the building last Thursday, the 16th of January."

Wilson said that Progressive Investments traveled from Lancaster to Parkesburg in December to look over the site. The school had been out of use since 1980. Prior to that, it was used as an elementary school since 1956 when Octorara High School was created.

The planned apartments, Wilson added, will fit well with the surrounding area, zoned residential. According to estimates, the renova-

tion for the school itself would cost about \$1.5 million. Three other buildings would cost a total of about \$2.8 million and would offer 20 units each.

Wilson said that final total costs, including site work, engineering fees, and bonding and financing, could carry a total price tag of more than \$6 million. The school, he added, would be restored to its original red color.

And to help finance the work at the school, the mayor said, investors may be eligible for historical low-interest loans and bonds.

"It can create a project in the community and the borough would get \$41,000 per year rather than \$763," he said. "That's what they're getting now."

Wilson said that revenues from the project will also find their way into Octorara coffers, bumping their yearly totals more than ten times their present amount.

The renovation to the old Parkesburg School will also increase the values of surrounding properties "and make the town more marketable," he said.

"Everything about it is positive," he



(photo by Jeff Clouser)

Frances Hery, a Parkesburg School graduate, looks out over the borough from the school. Hery said that she looks forward to seeing the school restored to its original grandeur.

explained. "My only interest is community pride. I'd hate to see that end up the way the Gap School ended up."

But not everyone looks forward to the completion of the project. Some residents of the Strasburg Avenue area contend that the influx of people to the buildings may cause traffic problems on their now peaceful streets.

In addition, Wilson recently approached the Octorara school board seeking 10-year tax easements on the site. The board, according to reports, shot that request down in a 9-0 vote.

Wilson said that he contacted W. Edwin Miller, of Progressive Investment Companies, to gain their interest in the project last fall.

"I know Edwin Miller," he said. "When the school came up for sale, I told (Dr. Warner) there was someone who would do justice to it. I wouldn't have gotten involved with it if I thought they were a bunch of quick-buck artists."

"They are really up about it," Wilson said of the Lancaster-based company. "I'm excited about their interest in the project."

But, the mayor maintained, the project is still in the crawling stages.

"I don't see that the project would fail," he said. "But it is very, very preliminary."

For Hery, the possible renovation of the school means another opportunity to reflect on the past. That, after all, is one of her favorite pastimes, she said.

"It would make me feel good," she said smiling. "I enjoy nostalgia. I like to look back and see how things were. People say how the good old days weren't so good. I think they were."



This is a view of the Parkesburg School in 1954 when it was still in use as a school. Notice the lack of broken windows and that the additional wing has not yet been added.