Nonprofits to rehab homes for veterans

Suffolk officials announced plans to turn over eight blighted houses, seized for unpaid property taxes, so that nonprofit groups can transform them into affordable rentals for veterans and their families in danger of becoming homeless.

Representatives of nonprofit groups say they expect to get needed state funding and finish work on the houses, which will accommodate 10 veteran families in about one year's time. The groups will also manage the rentals.

"It's a tragedy for any of our military heroes to return home and not have a place to live on the very land they fought to protect," said County Executive Steve Bellone, a U.S. Army veteran.

Bellone, standing in front of a Copiague house that has been vacant for two years, said the program will help veterans and bolster neighborhoods.

The sites, valued at between $780,000 to $935,000, include a vacant Central Islip parcel where three homes will be built; properties in Mastic, Medford and Yaphank where houses will be demolished and new single-family homes built; and a four-bedroom house in Mastic that will be rehabilitated and house three senior veterans with a manager.

The properties are being turned over to the nonprofit groups for $1 each, and past taxes owed will be forgiven. Rentals will be set at no more than 80 percent of the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development median income for Nassau-Suffolk adjusted for family size.

County officials say veterans will also receive services to help them readjust to civilian life after war. "This can't just be about providing four walls," said Legis. Steve Stern (D-Dix Hills), who sponsored legislation to make the program possible. "It has to be about developing a home and services so our veterans can put their heads on a pillow at night."

— RICK BRAND

CENTRE ISLAND

Board weighs hike in construction fees

The village board is mulling whether to increase the fees it charges for new homes, house renovations, the subdivision of lots and other costs related to new construction.

The board recently debated fee changes suggested by the village's building inspector, Joseph Richardson, but postponed further discussion until its next meeting in September.

"We're just in the early discussion stages now of what we should do," said village trustee and budget director Andrew Farren.

The goal is for the fees to cover the city's costs, to avoid raising taxes, he said. Farren said the postponement in discussion is in part so officials can research past and future costs to the village.

Mayor Lawrence Schmidlapp said "most of those fees haven't been changed in five or 10 years."

Among the suggestions was to maintain a $100 fee for certificate of occupancy and architectural-review-board applications for construction costing under $100,000, and raise the price to $500 for construction costing more than $100,000, Schmidlapp said.

The mayor said he is leaning against such a sliding-scale fee structure because it appears the city's costs don't vary greatly based upon the cost of construction.

But he said he's more open to increasing fees for costs incurred by the planning board and the zoning board of appeals.

Those costs vary depending on the complexity of the application and the size of houses, Farren said.

Richardson's suggestion was to double the clerical fee for such applications from $250 to $500.

HUNTINGTON

Cold Spring Harbor Lab marks 125 years

The Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory is celebrating 125 years of scientific research this month.

The private, nonprofit organization has focus areas in neuroscience, cancer, genomics and plant biology. It's home to eight Nobel Prize winners, 54 laboratories and more than 600 researchers and technicians.

The lab opened in July 1890 as a place where the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences could train high school and college teachers in marine biology. By 1904, the organization established a department of genetics.

Cold Spring Harbor is where James Watson, a co-discoverer of DNA, first publicly presented the concept in 1953. Watson became the director of the organization in 1968 and helped shift the lab's focus to the study of cancer. Watson became chancellor in 2003 before retiring in 2007.

In the 1970s, the laboratory received significant financial support from philanthropist and investment banker Charles Sammis Robertson of Lloyd Harbor. His nearly $8 million gift, along with the donation of his nearby estate, allowed the lab to establish endowments.

Since then, the research organization has continued to expand, adding new labs and research areas. It opened the Hillside Laboratories in 2009, six buildings that increased active research space by 40 percent.

It has an annual operating budget of $150 million and a $440 million endowment.

— VALERIE BALAISAN

MASSAPEQUA PARK. Ava Guglielmi, 4, of Massapequa Park plays on the monkey bars at John J. Burns Park yesterday. More typical summer weather is in store today, with less humidity than earlier in the week.