

# People Inc. Seeks Grant to Develop Apartments

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The head of People Inc. is optimistic about the chances of securing grant funding to turn the former Toms Brook Middle School into more than a dozen affordable housing apartments.

Rob Goldsmith, who serves as the president and CEO of the Abingdon nonprofit, said Monday that a community development block grant application requesting \$576,342 was submitted to the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development ahead of the deadline earlier this month. The Toms Brook Town Council had given permission for People Inc. to seek the grant, which would go toward renovating the old school's classrooms, auditorium and cafeteria into apartments and meeting space.

"We feel pretty good about that," Goldsmith said of the application. People Inc. has an option to buy the building from its current owner and would have a 15-year commitment to operate it as affordable housing.

It's a more than \$2 million project, so the grant alone will not cover the cost. Goldsmith said it appears that the organization will be eligible for \$1.2 million in tax credits that it applied for. The final piece would come from historic tax credits, which are applied for after the project's completion, he added.

To comply with the requirements for the historic tax credits, People Inc. had to "dramatically" decrease the number of units it wanted to construct to 14, Goldsmith said. The organization had originally planned for as many as two dozen apartments.

But with the grant application, there is at least a sign of hope that the school will receive the "tender love and care" that Mayor Phil Fauber has said it needs "big time." That's more than what can be said for some older houses in Mt. Jackson.

There, People Inc. had considered working with the town to make non-cosmetic improvements to owner-occupied houses through a community development block grant. However, Goldsmith said the grant requires a cluster of about 15 houses to be worked on, and while 10-12 homeowners expressed interest, no more than half were clustered together. A grant application was not submitted.

Goldsmith said People Inc. will continue to work with Mt. Jackson.

As for Toms Brook, an announcement from Gov. Bob McDonnell on the recipients of the grant funding could come in July, Goldsmith said.