

SOUTH KENT ST. HOUSES ARE SOLD

ROSE FOUNDATION FACELIFT PLANS END

By Stephanie M. Mangino

The Winchester Star

Winchester — It could be said that Greg Strosnider has mixed feelings about South Kent Street.

Strosnider, the executive director of the Robert E. Rose Memorial Foundation Inc., says he's extremely pleased with the renovation of a duplex owned by the foundation at 501-503 S. Kent.

He's also happy with a new home built next door at 507 S. Kent by Winchester-based KEE Construction Services LLC.

"I think this is a very nice little home," Strosnider said as he stood in its kitchen/living area.

The 507 S. Kent house was built after the construction company purchased the lot from the Rose Foundation and demolished an existing home.

The two-bedroom home, completed within the last few weeks, is on the market for \$199,000, said one of KEE Construction's owners, Daniel McKee.

Strosnider expressed excitement about the new house the foundation will soon have built for Vivienne Jackson, who donated properties on South Kent and East Cecil streets to the foundation.

Part of the foundation's arrangement with Jackson calls for the money generated from the sales of her former properties to go into an annuity fund that will provide payments to support Jackson, who is in her early 80s, Strosnider said.

He said the foundation had hoped to create new homes — similar to the one at 507 S. Kent — at seven South Kent properties (six featuring vacant homes, and one an open lot) — but that was not to be.

The idea was for some existing homes in the 400 block of South Kent to be demolished to make way for new, affordable, owner-occupied homes within the city's historic district. "But that didn't work," Strosnider said.

Several of the proposed demolitions were denied by the city's Board of Architectural Review, but City Council overturned the BAR's decision, prompting Preservation of Historic Winchester Inc. to file suit against the city in December in Winchester Circuit Court. The suit basically prevented any demolition from occurring.

But now the Rose Foundation no longer has to worry about the fate of the disputed properties at 404, 406, 412-414, and 418 S. Kent.

The organization sold the properties last week to Boford Properties LLC, according to Circuit Court records. The sale, for \$397,500, also included 408 S. Kent and, according to Strosnider, a vacant lot at 410 S. Kent.

In January, Boford also purchased a few other parcels, at 122-124 E. Cecil and 320 S. Kent, from the Rose Foundation for \$130,000, Circuit Court records state. The properties were also formerly owned by Jackson.

Boford Properties' registered agent, Matthew C. Sunderlin of Harrisonburg, could not be reached for comment on Friday.

Strosnider said he believes the new property owners plan to spruce up the houses in the 400 block of South Kent, do some painting, and eventually offer them to renters.

PHW President Franklin Wright said on Friday that he has not been able to contact the new owners to ask about their plans.

If Boford plans to renovate the disputed properties, Wright said PHW can move to dismiss its suit against the city.

If the group still wants to demolish, the suit will be retained, he said.

Wright added that PHW would also like to provide the new owners with advice and assistance on handling the properties.

Even with the recent sale, Strosnider said he's disappointed that the Rose Foundation was not able to give the entire neighborhood a facelift, as had been planned.

Several times, as he spoke, Strosnider held — and referred to — concept plans which displayed color drawings of the houses the Rose Foundation hoped to build.

He said he believes the foundation's plans offered a "golden opportunity for Kent Street to really turn around" and that the project would have made a real and lasting impact.

Jackson, who is living in the renovated duplex until her home is rebuilt, said she is enjoying her temporary home immensely.

She said she is pleased with anything Strosnider does. She then looked over her back fence at McKee, whose company performed the renovation work on the duplex, and said of his efforts: "He touches it with a magic wand."

Work on Jackson's East Cecil home could begin next week, Strosnider said. Rehabilitation of another of the donated properties — the former Community Store — on South Kent, will start later.

The store building will likely become several small apartments, and rehabilitated in a process similar to that used at the duplex, Strosnider said.

The duplex was basically gutted, and only its block exterior and hardwood floors were retained, he said.

The store has substantial structural challenges to deal with, however, since its back wall is cracked and separating, Strosnider added.

When all the construction is complete, the Rose Foundation will retain ownership of the 501503 S. Kent duplex, Jackson's home, and the former store, Strosnider said.

While he is proud of the completed work and anticipating the remaining projects, Strosnider does not plan to perform any more work in the neighborhood.

"I don't ever want to do anything in the historic district ever again," he said.

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