



NEWS RELEASE

The Pleasant Square Development LCC seeks to help revitalize the downtown area with multi-use facilities

For Immediate Release: *Thursday January 30, 2019 – Lebanon, Ohio* - The Pleasant Square Development, LLC, along with other organizations, is responding to the City of Lebanon's request to redevelop land in the Pleasant Square neighborhood.

In April 2018, Bethel AME Church submitted a proposal in response to the city's Pleasant Square Request for Qualifications (RFQ). This proposal is part of the church's long-term strategic plan. Members of the church saw the RFQ as an opportunity to acquire land for growing its ministries while revitalizing the surrounding community.

Bethel AME Church started a process of long-term strategic planning in 2013. Between 2013 and 2016 the church focused on landscaping, painting, replacing windows, restoring floors and updating the contents of our building that had been dedicated in 1861. In January of 2017 a new plan to be implemented between 2017 and 2020 was initiated. This plan called for continued renovations of the antique building as well as expanding to new spaces in order to add community ministries such as the multi-purpose facility and business incubator that are included in the RFQ proposal.

Meanwhile, two of Bethel's officers attended city meetings and contributed to The Lebanon Master Plan. When RFQs aligned with the Master Plan were announced, even though we were blindsided by a devastating fire on Dec. 13, 2017, Bethel decided to continue implementing our strategic plan by submitting a proposal for Pleasant Square Development. The fire destroyed the renovations that were in progress in the old building, but has not discouraged us from continuing to worship and serve in the community.

Bethel AME Church proposed to build our new worship and fellowship space. This building would include gathering spaces for community dialog and lifelong learning with a multipurpose room and a suite of offices for a business incubator. A central feature of the original proposal for development over time was high quality family owned homes as well as outdoor green space connected to downtown walking routes, and off street parking.

During the implementation planning process, Bethel found it necessary to have an organization established to carry out the work of this project. The Pleasant Square Development, LLC was founded as a partnership that consists of members of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and

representatives from partner organizations. Additional support will be made up of organizations like Empowering Connections and the MLK Community Coalition of Lebanon along with a community advisory group of homeowners, neighbors, business owners, churches, and faith-based organizations.

The project timeline has been divided into three phases. If approved, Implementation Phase I would begin in 2019 and include ground breaking for the new Bethel AME Church. Implementation Phase II would begin late in 2019 and likely extend into 2021. During Phase II the church would be completed along with construction of the multipurpose facility and business incubator. During this phase, the residential part of the proposal was also slated to begin. During the final phase, Implementation Phase III (2022 and beyond), the Pleasant Square Development, LLC will continue to participate in community renewal and to develop life-long learning options.

The Pleasant Square Development Project will foster a safe and healthy community by following the guidelines as set forth in the Think Downtown Lebanon Master Plan. Beyond the new houses and facilities, this project was designed to increase use of Pleasant Square park for community events, to add green space that tie into the Think Downtown Master Plan and to increase the walking score of the community.

The Pleasant Square Development, LLC (PSD) was created with the purpose of redeveloping the area while improving the lives of all people, honoring the legacy of the long-time neighbors who once occupied the properties and ultimately achieving the goals of the city's plan.

Karen Schaeffer, board member of PSD LLC and pastor of Bethel AME Church stated, "We believe this project will enhance the spiritual, physical, social and economic health of the neighborhood and therefore contribute to the overall well-being of the city."

A community town hall meeting was held in the fall of 2018 to share the vision of the RFQ. The community feedback was very positive.

Pleasant square residents felt that the proposal fit very well with the city plan and would make this area more connected to downtown. It was also important to current homeowners that the new residential project would be focused on owner-occupied homes, which is part of the original proposal.

The Pleasant Square Development, LCC continues to work with the city and partnering organizations and is committed to fully aligning this proposal with the Think Downtown Lebanon Master Plan.

###

For more information:

Contact Karen Schaeffer, 513-305-8295, katms@me.com

Raye Kimberlin, 513-258-1017, rayekimberlin@gmail.com