

Block grant to fund hospital demolition*

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*Site of proposed new Western Elementary School

ROMNEY — The money is all but in hand to tear down the old Hampshire Memorial Hospital.

Hampshire County was awarded a \$374,000 community development block grant Monday to fund the project that will clear the site off Depot Street for construction of a new elementary school serving the western end of the county.

“This is so much more than just an environmental, community development, historical preservation or economic development project,” Development Authority Executive Director Eileen Johnson told her colleagues in an email Monday afternoon.

The building has sat empty for 10 years, ever since Valley Health built a new hospital at Sunrise Summit.

Efforts to either sell the asbestos-riddled building or tear it down have fallen through over the decade.

County voters last year approved a school bond call that will build 3 new elementary schools, replacing 5 aging buildings. The old hospital was chosen as the site for the new West elementary, with the Development Authority responsible for its teardown.

In return, the school system will tear down Romney Elementary School and then swap the land to the Development Authority for the hospital site.

Monday's grant clears the final hurdle for the Development Authority after the state's Historic Preservation Office signed off a month ago on the demolition of the hospital that was built in 1957 with funding from the Hill-Burton Act.

"This project will consist of demolition and brownfield abatement of the former Hampshire Memorial Hospital," Gov. Jim Justice's announcement said. "The structure is no longer feasible for rehabilitation due to the structure's current state of deterioration and environmental contamination."

Johnson hand delivered the grant proposal to Charleston in January. In February the Development Authority awarded a contract for asbestos abatement to Morgantown-based Anderson Excavating.

Asbestos abatement should take about 45 days. Then the building can be demolished.

The Hampshire County Board of Education said the West and Central elementary schools will be built 1st. Central will be in Augusta beside the current Augusta Elementary.

The project, Johnson said, "is the perfect example of what can happen when multiple government and private sector entities work together toward a common purpose leveraging local, state and federal resources for public benefit."

The demolition grant was part of \$13.7 million in grants Justice announced Monday. The block grants are funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.