

## **Food**

# **Acord Food Pantry to stay in Willow Street location**

**By Stephanie Silverstein / [ssilvers@cnc.com](mailto:ssilvers@cnc.com)**

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Hamilton -

The building at 69 Willow St. in Hamilton that houses the Acord Food Pantry is in the perfect location: It's in the downtown area, accessible by clients who take the train, and is in a safe area. That's why those involved are thrilled that Harborlight Community Partners of Beverly has purchased the building and will continue leasing the space to Acord at or near the same price.

The building has been for sale since last year, putting those close to the organization on edge, as it was unclear whether they could remain in the space or would need to move.

"We are thrilled, just thrilled," said Lori Johnson, president of the Acord Food Pantry Board of Directors. "It could not be a better situation; it's really a win-win for the community, for Acord, even the taxpayers, because this is a better situation for the town. They've got affordable units they need."

The building currently houses Acord Food Pantry on the bottom floor and two apartments on the top floor. Harborlight is applying for funds to help with the creation of four affordable housing units in the building: three studio apartments on the top floor, and one handicapped accessible ADA-compliant one-bedroom apartment on the bottom floor.

Acord currently uses the entire bottom floor, which Johnson said is more space than they need.

Harborlight Community Partners Executive Director Andrew DeFranza said much of the local funding is in place, and the sale agreement is intact. From here, they are applying for regional and state funding. The state funding would represent nearly half of the project's budget, he said, adding he expects to hear if it's approved toward the end of the year.

At the Hamilton Town Meeting on May 4, voters will decide whether to use Community Preservation Act funds to contribute to the affordable housing project. If it is approved, Johnson and DeFranza said, that would make a strong statement to the state in its decision to approve state funds for the project.

"It demonstrates pretty serious commitment locally, and that will help with leveraging state funding," DeFranza said. "The fact that a town like Hamilton has put in significant resources will be very compelling to the authorities that are going to make the decision on the funding."

Johnson said, "If we don't get the support, the entire deal may fall apart. Truly we may not be able to — Harborlight may not be able to — refurbish the building and go forward with the project. Acord would be looking for a new home again."

DeFranza added that Hamilton can take pride in showing how a small town can use CPA money for

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affordable housing projects, which he said has been a challenge to find in other small towns.

“It’s sometimes difficult to find a project to do,” he said. “They should be pretty proud of themselves.”

If the project is funded, the building will be refurbished and will have a new look to the outside of the building. It will look like other buildings in the area, and will be aesthetically pleasing, DeFranza said. Additionally, it will have environmentally friendly materials, high efficiency heat and water systems, and possibly a new septic system.

The Acord Food Pantry will be doing fundraising to help with the cost of refurbishing its space.

If the funding is all granted, work could begin at the end of the year or early in 2010.

“Sometimes, when you pray hard enough, dreams come true and this is what it feels like for us,” Johnson said.

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