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### **Bedford's first community center may open in 2021**

Issues remain to be resolved, including funding and resolving an expired lease

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BEDFORD — After years of fundraising and renovations, supporters of the Stevens-Buswell Community Center are hoping to open its doors in 2021, but there are still several hurdles to cross.

“The future plan is to open the main floor in two years,” said Beverly Thomas, co-chairman of the Friends of the Stevens-Buswell Subcommittee of the Bedford Historical Society.

To date, about \$400,000 for the renovation project has been raised, which includes grants, donations and other fundraising initiatives.

Organizers acknowledge, however, that more funds still need to be raised, more work needs to be done and the issue of an expired lease needs to be resolved.

The project started in 2010 with three phases — remediation, renovation of the main floor and completion of the lower level.

“We had a lot of mold in the building, and asbestos. The roof was leaking,” Susan Tufts-Moore, co-chair of the subcommittee, told the town council.

The goal of the project is to create a place in Bedford that will bring the community together, said Tufts-Moore, noting there is no community center or senior center in town.

“We want to provide gathering spaces for a multitude of cultural events, educational programs, social activities and recreational opportunities,” she said, adding the new community center will also provide meeting space for organizations, a place for youth to participate in programs and an area for seniors to enjoy various activities.

The Stevens-Buswell building was the first two-room school house in Bedford, and was built in 1921 at the corner of North Amherst Road and Bedford Center Road.

An addition was constructed in 1938, and the building was most recently used as a museum. As part of the renovations, new interior walls have been installed, a majority of the original wood floors have been repaired and restored on the main level and tile has been installed in the primary bathroom.

“We will be installing the original school house lights and blackboard,” said Thomas.

The historical society signed a lease with the town in 2010, however that lease expired five years later when the group failed to meet some of the conditions outlined in the document, according to Town Manager Rick Sawyer.

Those conditions required that phase one of restoration be completed within one year, phase two be completed within five years and phase three be completed within eight years.

It has now been nearly nine years since the lease was first signed, and the project is currently in phase two.

Sawyer said the town has been working with the group throughout the past several years to come to a new agreement while it continues making improvements to the building.

The town council met last week in non-public session to consider whether the lease should be renewed with the organization.

Although the council did not vote on the lease issue, it did vote to form a subcommittee to continue reviewing the matter and return to the council with options to be considered, said Sawyer.

A detailed business plan has been established, and it is being recommended that the future community center be overseen by a new nonprofit comprised of representatives from different organizations and community members, according to Thomas.

She expects that annual operating costs will reach about \$45,600, however annual revenues are projected to be about \$47,300, which will include membership dues, rental fees, fundraising, donations and activity fees.

“We would be breaking even, pretty much,” said Thomas. An open house is tentatively being planned for Aug. 11, said Tufts-Moore, adding the group is hoping to have its lease renewed so that its fundraising campaign can be rejuvenated.

It will cost about \$200,000 to complete the work on the main floor of the building, and an additional \$217,000 to finish renovations on the lower level, according to organizers.