

Affordable-housing developer presents plan to Hallowell board

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Community Housing of Maine is hoping to convert a Stevens Commons building to a 30-unit affordable housing development for seniors.

By [Jason Pafundi](#) Staff Writer

HALLOWELL — A Portland-based affordable-housing developer went before the Planning Board on Wednesday night and presented its preliminary plans to renovate the Central Building on the Stevens Commons property as housing for the elderly.

Community Housing of Maine has signed a purchase option with Stevens Commons developer Matt Morrill and submitted [a preliminary application](#) to the Planning Board for a “historic restoration of the 25,000-square-foot Central Building into affordable apartments for seniors,” according to a news release last week from Community Housing of Maine.

Morrill said it’s an important first step in the right direction toward the redevelopment of the campus.

“We feel this project meshes well with the master plan (for the property),” he said.

The next steps in the process include Community Housing of Maine submitting a completed application, a site plan review and public hearing; the review and hearing were not scheduled by the Planning Board.

Erin Cooperrider, development director for Community Housing of Maine, said the organization is excited about the opportunity to be involved with the Stevens Commons project. “It’s really a beautiful campus,” she said.

Cooperrider said there are no plans to change the exterior of the structure, but there are plans to restore the brick and windows while converting the building’s interior to about 30 studio and 1-bedroom units. She forecasted a cost of about \$3.5 million to complete the project.

The organization plans to keep a symmetrical design throughout the three levels, and there will be a community area in the building for residents. There will be shared parking and green space, and the building will utilize existing utilities and access points. The building also will stay true to its history by respecting existing corridors and stairwells, Cooperrider said.

Morrill, of Grand View Log and Timber Frames in Winthrop, bought the former Stevens School property from the state for \$215,000 a year ago. Since he acquired the campus last April, Morrill has stated his vision for the campus includes affordable senior housing, which he said Hallowell and central Maine desperately need.

Cooperrider said an architect and structural engineer already have begun working on building plans and have met

with Hallowell Code Enforcement Officer Doug Ide to discuss the subdivision site plans. Cooperrider said that similar projects by her organization take about two years to complete.

In addition to the work being done at Stevens Commons, Hallowell officials and residents are busy preparing for a Water Street reconstruction project set to begin around this time next year, as well as planning the construction of a new fire station — with up to \$1 million from an anonymous donor — on the Stevens Commons property.

According to Morrill's master plan for developing the property, the Central Building is in the best condition of the buildings on campus. It has "soaring ceilings and large windows that peer down over the common (to) the Kennebec River" and has a very appealing layout.

Morrill has asked for the city's help in redeveloping the campus, which was built in the 1800s as a boarding school for girls. Voters will go to the polls April 28 for a [special election](#) to approve or deny a \$2.36 million bond package that includes \$600,000 for the Stevens Commons redevelopment. The money would help repair the roads and sidewalks on the property, which would become owned and maintained by the city.

Community Housing of Maine, a statewide nonprofit organization, has been developing properties in Kennebec County since 1995 as part of its mission to provide housing for low-income and disadvantaged people, as well as workforce and senior housing.

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