

Hallowell accepts donation of Stevens Commons roads

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By Jason Pafundi

HALLOWELL — The City Council voted Wednesday to accept a donation of roads within Stevens Commons from the property's owner, paving the way for the start of infrastructure repairs on the campus.

Matt Morrill gave [several acres](#) of roadway — at Beech Street and Coos Lane — and an 8-acre conservation area to the city as part of the deal to fund the road work using \$600,000 approved by voters in April as part of a \$2.36 million bond package. Under deal's terms, the work could not begin on the 54-acre property off Winthrop Street until Morrill transferred the deeds to the road network to the city.



The city of Hallowell soon will begin work to improve the infrastructure below the roads at Stevens Commons, the former Stevens School complex, seen here on April 26, 2016. Staff file photo by Joe Phelan



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The conservation area on the north side of the campus will provide open space for the city forever, conservation commission member Deb Sewall said. The land also gives people access to the Howard Hill Conservation Area, a 164-acre wooded tract in Augusta that is a backdrop to the Maine State House.

“(The commission) thanks Matt Morrill for stepping up to the plate and providing the city with the opportunity to preserve these 8 acres,” she said.

Earlier this month, Hallowell officials determined the upcoming infrastructure and road work at Stevens Commons is not subject to Planning Board review. The determination was made after discussions among the City Council, City Manager Nate Rudy, Planning Board members, Stevens Commons owner and developer Matt Morrill and legal counsel for the city and the developer.

As part of the agreement with the city, Morrill will remain involved in the bidding process and will help oversee the work done on the site. He bought the former Stevens School property from the state in April 2016. Three bids were submitted, and Rudy said the winning bid will be chosen at Wednesday's meeting.

Rudy said the plan doesn't call for widening any of the existing roads, partly because that's what the Maine Historic Preservation Commission has required for maintaining the Stevens Commons “quad” and because it serves the

campus better to not have wide roads there.

After the official transfer of the roads, the council authorized City Manager Nate Rudy to enter into an agreement with McGee Construction to complete the project. According to the proposal, the work will cost \$675,000, which is \$75,000 more than was allocated in the bond package.

The council voted 6-1 to use \$100,000 from tax increment financing revenue to cover the additional costs. Ward 5 Councilor Lisa Harvey-McPherson opposed using that money because it's not what voters [approved](#) in April.

"I don't think we should be spending more than \$600,000, which is what we asked the voters to approve," she said.

Some of the work in the proposal includes reclamation of existing pavement, tree clearing, installation of a water main, service connections and hydrants, installation of new sewer mains, service connections, manholes, and asphalt paving for roadway, sidewalks and curbing.

The proposal indicated the work will be substantially complete on or before Dec. 15, and Rudy said the project can begin at any time now that the bond has closed.

Morrill, of Grand View Log and Timber Frames in Winthrop, has said that improving the road network within Stevens Commons will make the property more attractive to outside developers, and he needs other developers to help him realize his vision of turning the campus into mixed-use development and a "centerpiece of Hallowell."

In the year since he bought the campus from the state, Morrill has done a number of below-the-surface infrastructure improvements, found six tenants to lease office space in the Baker Building, secured a commitment from Community Housing of Maine to convert the Central Building [into housing for the elderly](#) and reached a deal with the city to locate a new fire station on the site of the Farwell Building.

In other business, the council approved the contract with State Paving Inc. for work on Outlet, Town Farm and Vaughan roads and Sunrise Drive in the rural part of Hallowell. The contract price is not to exceed \$371,357.90, well under the \$575,000 allocated in the bond package approved by voters in April.

The agreement with the contractor states that the project must be substantially completed by Oct. 31, and the city will receive \$250 per day for every day the contractor fails to complete the work by that date.

The rural Hallowell road project also is expected to begin in the next few weeks.

Mayor Mark Walker also told the council of his plans to appoint a Noise Ordinance Committee at the council's August meeting. The committee, recommended by former councilor and current chairwoman of the Ordinance Rewrite Committee Kate Dufour, will be tasked with reviewing the city's noise ordinance to see how it could be amended to better suit the needs of the city, its businesses and residents and how violations can be better enforced by the Hallowell Police Department.

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