

Hallowell fire station tops city priorities

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Posted Yesterday at 6:46 PM

City voters approved a \$2.36 million bond package last month, so several projects hinging on that vote are now set to officially get underway, including the city's new fire station.

By [Jason Pafundi](#) Staff Writer

HALLOWELL — Now that the \$2.36 million bond has passed, City Manager Nate Rudy said finalizing design plans for the city's new fire station is his top priority.

Rudy said last week he was just starting to get his feet back on the ground after the April 28 special election that saw city voters overwhelming approve a \$2.36 million bond package that will shape Hallowell for decades.

"I think a lot of people thought this was going to be a squeaker, so the results were pretty amazing," the city manager said during in his office Tuesday. "The response from anybody who's spoken to me about (the election) has been very positive, and they're excited about the prospects."

Residents voted 61 percent to 39 percent to approve [the controversial bundle](#), a bigger margin than many in Hallowell, including Rudy, expected.

The six-component bond includes \$625,000 for next year's Water Street reconstruction project; \$600,000 for infrastructure improvements at Stevens Commons; \$535,000 for rural Hallowell road maintenance; \$300,000 to improve parking in downtown; \$220,000 to restore the fire station's historic tower; and \$80,000 for city building maintenance.

Rudy, who became city manager almost a year ago after the unexpected March 2015 death of Stefan Pakulski, said it took a few days for everybody to realize all the work was happening and he expects it'll take a few weeks to get all the planning in place.

One of Rudy's immediate tasks was prioritizing the components and other city projects, while keeping a focus on the day-to-day things needed to keep the city government running.

"As always, the focus of my work is prioritizing and sequencing all the little tasks that make up the time line for these projects," he said. "Meanwhile, there's all the stuff you have to do every day to keep the wheels turning."

Because of an agreement between the city and the anonymous donor who pledged \$1 million to build a new fire station at Stevens Commons, that is Rudy's No. 1 focus right now. The deal, which was contingent on the station being built on the 54-acre Stevens campus, also stipulates the city must have a pact with a contractor to build the station by June 20.

He has met several times with Fire Chief Jim Owens about preliminary designs of the [new station](#), and he expects to continue meeting with Owens and Stevens Commons developer Matt Morrill to discuss plans.

"There will also be consultants, architects and builders involved in the fire station discussion," Rudy said.

Morrill announced last month that the new station will be built where the Farwell Building now stands, behind the Stevens Building on Coos Lane.

“We continue to work with the City on advancing plans for the new fire station,” Morrill said.

While working on that, Rudy needs to line up contractors to get started on work on Vaughan, Outlet and Town Farm roads in rural Hallowell.

“Designs and specs for the new roads and infrastructure are being finalized and will go out to public bid soon,” Morrill said. “We continue to work with Community Housing of Maine on their senior housing project and are making provisions to accommodate the new location for the Hallowell Farmers Market.”

Morrill has said he hopes the road network improvements at Stevens Commons will be completed later this year, and he’ll be acting as general contractor for the project — and attorneys from the city and his Mastway Development company will be involved.

“We had a staff meeting Tuesday and we’re putting together a game plan for getting Request for Proposals ready for the road projects,” Rudy said. “The real work began some time ago, but now it’ll be in earnest until contracts are signed, and then we’ll start managing and overseeing the work.”

The Water Street reconstruction project is being handled by the Maine Department of Transportation, and Rudy said there’s a good working relationship between the city and DOT officials, including project manager Ernie Martin.

Rudy said there is a very real need for parking in Hallowell on certain days and certain times, and he understands the concern from downtown merchants about the times of day where parking is a premium. The bond includes \$300,000 to [improve parking](#) in downtown.

Subject to negotiation, the current plan is that Linda Bean, one of the heirs to the LL Bean fortune, will sell the historic Dummer House — on Dummer’s Lane — to Arron Sturgis, of Preservation Timber Framing in Berwick. The city will acquire the land, except for a parcel on the corner of Central and Second streets, which will go to Sturgis.

Rudy said Sturgis will pay to move the house to that lot, and the house will have a conservation easement placed upon it. Maine Preservation will receive a stipend from the city to make sure the easements are maintained in perpetuity. Rudy said the amount of the stipend has not yet been negotiated.

The city will then decide what type of parking lot to install on the land using the money from the bond. Rudy said there is a limited amount of parking that can be developed for that sum of money, but a 30-spot asphalt parking lot cannot be constructed for \$300,000. There is earthwork that needs to be done, the city manager said, and the cost of asphalt is surprisingly high.

“I think we need to come up with constructive ways to deal with (the parking problem),” he said. “At some point, though, you run out of places to put parking spaces because there’s no place left to pave.”

Rudy wants to get the parking situation sorted out this summer ahead of next year’s reconstruction project, and he’s also talking with the owners of some lots on upper Central Street to see if the city can use those for parking, too.

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