

University of Maine at Augusta pursues agreement to create student housing

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By Sam Shepherd

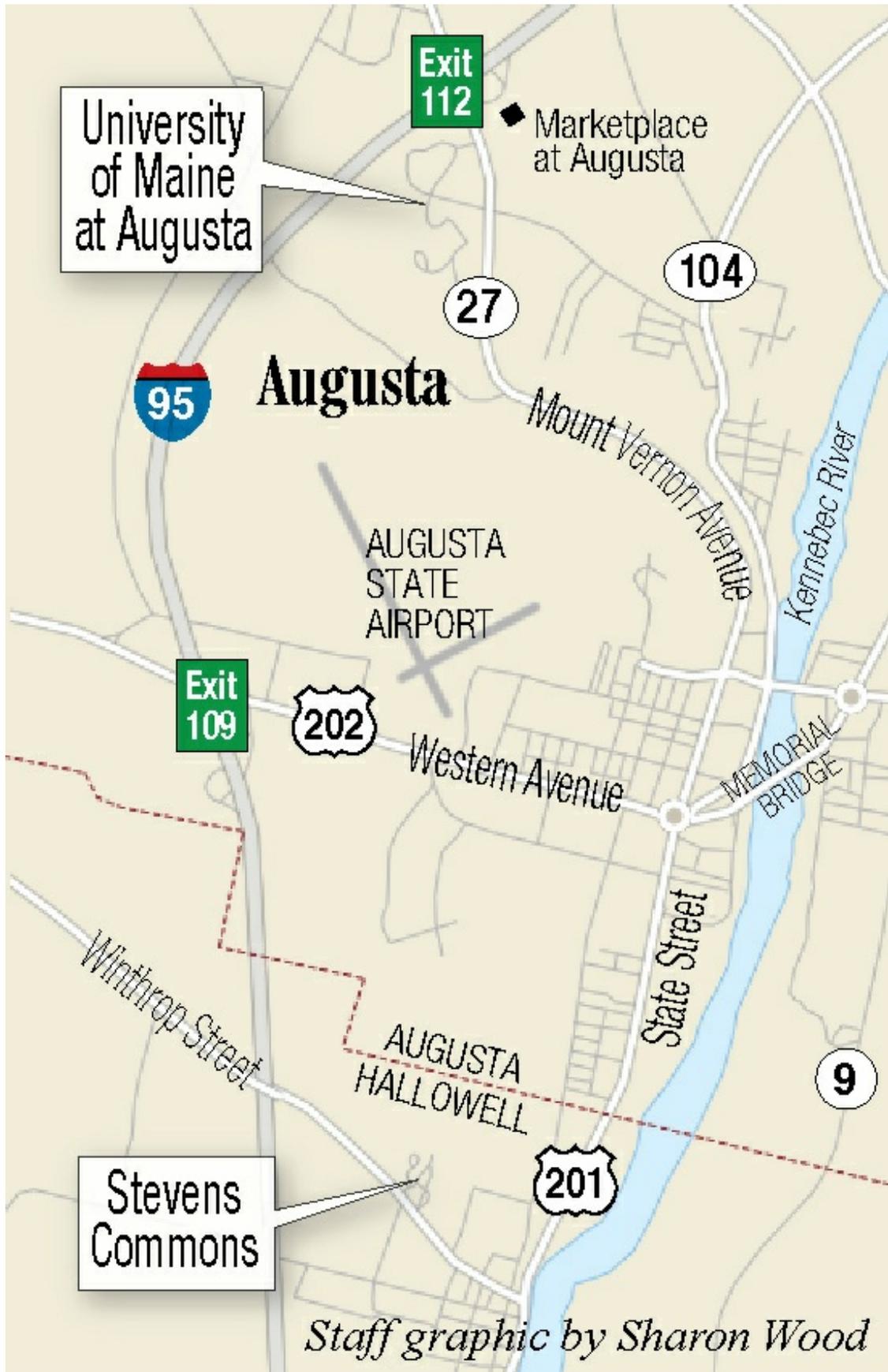
September 14, 2018

AUGUSTA — The University of Maine at Augusta, historically a commuter school, could be entering the student housing market.

UMA spokeswoman Domna Giatas said Mastway Development was awarded a contract to negotiate a short-term lease for student apartments at Stevens Commons in Hallowell — pending approval from the University of Maine System board of trustees, which meets Sunday and Monday in Presque Isle.



The Stevens Building in Hallowell could be converted into a 20-unit student housing complex for the University of Maine at Augusta if the University of Maine board of trustees approves a lease agreement early next week. The site plan also will be discussed Wednesday at a meeting of the Hallowell Planning Board. Staff photo by Sam Shepherd



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The project also is scheduled for discussion at the Hallowell Planning Board meeting Wednesday. The first item on the agenda is a site plan review for a “minor project” by Landmark Corp., an agent for Matt Morrill, owner of Mastway Development and Stevens Commons, to convert the existing Stevens Building into “21 apartments for student housing.”

Morrill purchased the 53-acre Stevens Commons from the state for \$215,000 in 2016. The name Stevens Commons is a tribute to the Stevens School, which was built there in the 1870s as a girls’ school, and more recently was occupied by state offices and other agencies.

The Stevens Building, on Coos Lane, has access to an estimated 55 parking spots, according to Morrill’s master plan. The three-story brick building has a 4,700-square-foot footprint and 17,936 square feet of floor space.

Morrill said his company will carry out the conversion of the Stevens Building into apartments and then lease them to the university. He said the building is set up well to become apartments.

“Some work was done when we first bought the property to stabilize and protect the building until it was time to redevelop the Stevens Building,” he said Friday. “Although this will be a significant renovation project, the main structure is in really good shape.

“The building will receive a complete renovation, with new systems, utilities, finishes, elevator, roof repair and exterior finishes, as well as new parking, underground utilities, site lights and landscaping.”

The other item on the agenda is a “minor” amendment to a subdivision approval for Landmark Corp.

Giatas said university officials have discussed housing for a number of years.

“UMA does not have any other housing. We are a commuter school at this point,” she said Friday. “This would be an opportunity to take an initial step to evaluate the viability (of student housing).”

Giatas said the process is in the beginning stages and she did not know which students would occupy the potential apartments. Meeting materials said the property is “intended to support enrollment growth in key academic programs including aviation, architecture, music and nursing.”

UMA has about 6,200 students, according to the school website, making it the third largest school in the University of Maine System.

Materials released ahead of the university trustees meeting say the lease would begin Aug. 1, 2019. While the planning board’s agenda states 21 apartments, the trustees’ news release says the lease would make 20 furnished apartments available, with a total of 38 beds. Only 32 of those beds would be move-in ready by August 2019. The remaining six would be added in January 2020.

The proposed lease would have an initial term of five years and would have a maximum cost of about of \$1.5 million over the term. If two five-year extensions were renewed, the maximum cost could reach \$5.3 million.

The university plans to cover the lease cost “from student housing fees from residents of the facility and from tuition revenue associated with increases in credit hours resulting from the availability of the facility.” The meeting packet says “assuming a 92 percent occupancy rate with 20 percent out-of-state students, this initiative is projected to yield an incremental 918 credit hours and approximately \$300,000 in tuition and revenue annually.”

Rent is expected to cost \$675 a month, the trustees’ release said.

Mastway’s Stevens Commons proposal was selected on Aug. 10 after receiving the highest score of all proposals. Proposals were limited geographically to areas within a 25-minute drive of the UMA campus, Giatas said. Stevens Commons is about 15 minutes from the university, according to Google Maps.

She said Mastway Development was selected from “a competitive bid process” with other potential developers.

Morrill said he was “thrilled to have this chance to work with UMA and welcome them to Stevens Commons.”

An affordable-housing development is also in the works at Stevens Commons. Portland-based developer Community Housing of Maine was given a [site plan extension last month](#) after funding took longer than expected through the Maine State Housing Authority. Construction could start early next year.

The city has given Morrill a forgivable \$238,000 loan and \$600,000 from a voter-approved bond package for infrastructure improvements to Stevens Commons. Morrill also donated the parcel of land in Stevens Commons on which the donor-funded \$1.9 million Hallowell Fire Station was built.

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