

Planning Board to continue review of Stevens Commons

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By Jason Pafundi

HALLOWELL — The Planning Board will conduct a preliminary review of a subdivision plan for Stevens Commons during its meeting Wednesday night at City Hall.

Stevens Commons owner and developer Matt Morrill said this is the next step in the process to divided some of the 54-acre campus' buildings into individual parcels that started several months ago.



Developer Matt Morrill talks during a tour Oct. 7, 2016, at Stevens Commons in Hallowell. The Planning Board will conduct a preliminary review for the property Wednesday. Staff photo by Joe Phelan



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One of the buildings being divided into its own parcel is the Central Building at the center of the campus, located off Winthrop Street.

Community Housing of Maine, a Portland-based affordable-housing developer, plans to renovate the building as [housing](#) for the elderly. According to a preliminary application submitted to the Planning Board in April, the organization's design calls for a "historic restoration of the 25,000-square-foot Central Building into affordable apartments for seniors."

There are no plans to change the exterior of the structure, but there are plans to restore the brick and windows while

converting the buildings' interior to about 30 studios and 1-bedroom apartments. An official from Community Housing of Maine 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.

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.

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 approved a \$2.36 million bond package that includes \$600,000 for the Stevens Commons redevelopment. The money is funding the repair of roads and sidewalks on the property. Morrill will [transfer ownership](#) of the infrastructure network to the city during a special council meeting Wednesday.

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.

Morrill has not said what he plans to do with the other individual parcels created by this subdivision plan, nor has he specified what other buildings are being parceled.

Last week, Morrill [donated](#) the Farwell Building and its 0.67-acre parcel of land to the city, which will demolish the structure to make way for the city's new fire station. The property has an estimated value of nearly \$200,000, and the city will use up to \$1 million in funds from an anonymous donor to build its new fire station.

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