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## Politics and the City: Many hands pull for Stearns Tavern move



The Stearns Tavern at 651 Park Ave, Worcester, will be moved to a new location about 1/2 mile away. T&G File Photo/Christine Peterson

By [Nick Kotsopoulos](#)  
Telegram & Gazette Staff

Posted Jan. 24, 2016 at 6:00 AM

With little fanfare, work began Friday morning on the relocation of the historic Stearns Tavern from the Webster Square area to its planned new home, about a half-mile away at the site of the former Coes Knife factory on Mill Street.

A backhoe and some drilling equipment dug test wells at the southern end of Coes Pond to determine the soil that exists there and whether there would be any environmental issues associated with putting in a foundation for the now-vacant, two-story building.

The work was a first step in preparation for moving Stearns Tavern there this spring.

It is a project that is being compared to an old-fashioned barn raising, when people used to help out their neighbors by volunteering to help build their barns.

In this instance, several companies have not only stepped forward to be part of the Stearns Tavern relocation project but also have offered their time and services at no cost to the city.

And we're not talking about pocket change in this instance, either. Some have estimated that the pro bono work offered by these companies could run as high as \$100,000, and maybe even more.

"The amount of commitment to this project is unprecedented," said City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. "We are most grateful to them for supporting our vision of a successful opening of a multigenerational, universally accessible playground and for helping to save the historic Stearns Tavern, which will provide year-round programming, recreation and workforce training to those who have been underserved for so long."

In the scheme of things, this is not the most important project on the city's agenda.

In some ways, though, it's just as important as those megamillion-dollar projects where shiny new buildings are constructed.

What you have is an effort to preserve one of the oldest structures in the city - Stearns Tavern was built in 1812 and was facing a date with the wrecking ball - and bringing it back to life by incorporating it as part of a four-season, multigenerational park and universally accessible playground planned for that site.

The building, which will be operated at its new location by the Seven Hills Foundation, will be used to create more opportunities for services to people with disabilities on a full-time, year-round basis.

The story behind this story, however, is how it has become more than just a "city project."

What started off as an initiative involving the city, Preservation Worcester and the Seven Hills Foundation has morphed into something much bigger, involving community groups like the Coes Zone and several area companies.

To minimize the use of taxpayer money for the project, Mr. Augustus turned to the private sector to see if it could help out in any way. And many companies have responded in a most generous way.

CDR Maguire will be providing the foundation drawings for the new home of Stearns Tavern, providing oversight of the project with project team members and coordinating with the contractor that will be digging the foundation.

Just the work related to the foundation alone could cost \$50,000 or more.

Matthew J. Amorello, a former state senator who is now vice president for business development for CDR Maguire, said he learned of the project at a meeting of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

He said he was approached by Philip J. Niddrie, who spends part of his time at City Hall as special projects coordinator in the Office of the City Manager, to see if his company could help out with the project.

Mr. Amorello said he jumped on board as soon as he heard what the plans involved.

"How could we not say yes?" he said. "When you add in all the other great firms that are also participating, it is wonderful community project in which we are all giving something back to city. It's a lot like a Colonial-era barn raising project when everyone chips in."

For Lamoureux Pagano and Associates, which will be providing architectural services to assist with the tavern's move, being part of the Stearns Tavern project fits right in with its expertise in working with historic buildings.

"It's really a great project that has a lot of enthusiasm," said Robert Para Jr. "It also fit with our ideals of maintaining the historic fabric of the city, and giving back to the community that has given so much to us. The tavern's history is as a community gathering place, and we are pleased to be able to contribute to making it a community resource again."

Nitsch Engineering is also involved with the project. Matt Brassard, executive project manager, said the Stearns Tavern relocation project fits into one of his company's goals, which is to improve the communities in which it does business

"After (Mr. Niddrie) asked me about getting involved with this project, our answer was an easy Yes," Mr. Brassard said. "It was a perfect opportunity for us to get involved with a project that was perfectly aligned with our goals. So we decided to help out as best we could at no charge.

"Personally, as a Worcester resident, I have been very gratified to see so many people in city government and the general public pooling their efforts to get this job done," he added.

Marylou Armstrong, a licensed site professional at Nover-Armstrong Associates Inc., said when she was approached about potentially donating professional environmental services for the project, she, too, did not hesitate to get on board.

"The relocation and reuse of this beautiful historic structure along with additional improvements such as playground areas will enhance recreational possibilities and create service opportunities for people with disabilities," Ms. Armstrong said. "I think it is very important for firms to give back to the community and community partnering is an important part of our philosophy."

Also participating in the project is Drilex Environmental of West Boylston, which is providing drilling and well-installation services.

“All of these firms are not costing the city any tax dollars,” Mr. Niddrie said. “It’s a real team effort and thousands of dollars are being saved to this juncture.”

Much work still lies ahead, however, to complete the tavern relocation and preservation project. City officials are hoping that others might be willing to step up as well to help with this project.

Like any barn raising, the city can sure use all the help it can get.

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