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\$500K sought for upgrades at Stearns Tavern



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WORCESTER - City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. is recommending a \$500,000 loan order for the final phase of renovations to the Stearns Tavern.

Mr. Augustus said the work will focus on fitting out the interior to enable occupancy of the historic building, which is owned by the city.

Because the main structure is more than 200 years old, a consultant was brought on to review the substructure of the entire facility, according to Michael E. Traynor, the city's chief development officer.

He said it was determined that much of the building's infrastructure does not meet modern code requirements and the systems — heating, ventilation, air conditioning, electrical wiring, etc. — need to be replaced.

“The requested funding will support this remaining phase that will focus on work to bring the facility up to modern-day code requirements and ensure the facility's public areas are fully handicapped accessible,” Mr. Traynor wrote in a report that goes before the City Council Tuesday night.

The council will take up the city manager's recommendation for the \$500,000 borrowing.

The 206-year-old Stearns Tavern is located at Coes Park on Mill Street. The tavern building is intended to become one of the focal points of the park, which includes a universally accessible playground.

The Seven Hills Foundation eventually will occupy the first floor of the building, where it will operate a café and other programs.

For many years, the two-story building was at 651 Park Ave. near Webster Square. In 2016, the building was separated from its foundation and [moved to the Coes Pond site](#).

Since then, an addition was put on for bathrooms, siding was repaired and replaced, and new windows were installed, Mr. Traynor said. In addition, new entryways were constructed, handrails and accessible ramps were installed, and the siding was repainted.

Mr. Traynor noted that most of that work would not have been possible without the financial support and volunteer efforts from the private sector. He said 90 private-sector partners have provided an estimated \$984,000 in donations and volunteer services. In addition, the city received a \$400,000 state MassWorks grant for the project.

Philip J. Niddrie, who has been coordinating the relocation effort for the city, said more donations for Stearns Tavern have been committed to the project, including sinks, toilets and a furnace. He said without all the donations that have been received, the project would have been impossible.

“Also, without Preservation Worcester and Seven Hills Foundation we would be at a significant disadvantage,” Mr. Niddrie said.

Built in 1812 by Charles Stearns, the building was originally located at 1030 Main St. One of the oldest buildings in the city, it opened as a tavern and later was operated as a hotel by Joseph Curtis and was a stagecoach stop for people traveling through the city.

Starting in the 1920s, the building was home to a variety of other businesses, including a furniture shop in the 1950s and a carpet store in the 1960s.

In 1974, the structure was moved to 651 Park Ave., where it was turned into a bank. When its last tenant, Bank of America, vacated the building in May 2013, ownership reverted to Salloom Realty Corp., which owns the land the building sat on.

In 2014, Salloom Realty sought permission to raze the building, but the Historical Commission refused to grant a waiver to the city's demolition-delay ordinance, which puts a one-year hold on the razing of historic structures.

During the one-year delay, an agreement was reached to transfer ownership of the building to Preservation Worcester. Once the building was moved, the city took ownership.