

## Stearns Tavern fund drive reaches \$1 million



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Posted Oct 24, 2018 at 7:20 PM Updated Oct 24, 2018 at 9:53 PM

WORCESTER - The Stearns Tavern relocation project has reached a significant milestone, having surpassed \$1 million in contributions from the private sector.

As of last week, the project had received slightly more than \$1 million worth of in-kind services and monetary donations from 96 businesses and nonprofit groups, according to Philip J. Niddie, who has been coordinating the relocation effort for the city.

He said the milestone was reached two years to the day when [the 206-year-old building was moved](#) from its old home on Park Avenue in the Webster Square area to Coes Park on Mill Street.

Mr. Niddie said such a level of private contribution is unprecedented for a project of this type, adding that it would not have been possible without those contributions as well as funding provided by the city, state and federal governments.

“It has been a long haul for us all,” he said of the project, which the city has partnered with Preservation Worcester for 2½ years. “We have all committed because of our collective and

clear-cut belief in the noteworthy goals set by Preservation Worcester to salvage one of Worcester's oldest buildings and by Seven Hills Foundation in the development of a public space that provides work force development opportunities for people with disabilities in our community."

Mr. Niddrie said the city is seeking bids to complete the interior renovation of the building and all its infrastructure, including HVAC, sprinklers, plumbing and electrical work.

"Much to do, and the budget is very, very tight," he said. "The strong environment for construction opportunities has produced some quality firms to respond, but the costs are high. The city manager has authorized us to move forward and we are proceeding."

Earlier this year, the City Council, on the recommendation of City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr., approved a [\\$500,000 loan order](#) for the final phase of renovations to the Stearns Tavern.

The city also received a \$400,000 MassWorks grant from the state for the project.

The remaining work focuses on fitting out the interior to enable occupancy of the historic building, which is owned by the city.

The main structure is more than 200 years old and much of its infrastructure does not meet modern code requirements, so systems need to be replaced.

The tavern building is intended to become one of the focal points of Coes 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. The cafe is to be open to the public year-round.

Mr. Niddrie said Stearns Tavern will enable the development of social, work and daily living skills for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism and brain injury, supported through Seven Hills by the state Department of Developmental Services and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

"This partnership and unique mission will offer creative, inclusive programming for the immediate neighborhood and community at large to meet, work and play," Mr. Niddrie said.

For many years, the two-story building was at 651 Park Ave. 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. In addition, new entryways have been constructed, handrails and accessible ramps were installed, and the siding was repainted.