

Council making plans for historic renovation

Winterville High School

By Jennifer L. Johnson | news@onlineathens.com | Story updated at 11:47 pm on 9/21/2009

Richard Hamm/Correspondent

The old Winterville High School will be checked for asbestos before renovations.

WINTERVILLE - City leaders have taken the first step toward renovating the historic Winterville High School - finding out just what's inside.

The Winterville City Council recently agreed to spend \$1,440 for an asbestos inspection of the old Winterville High School and auditorium, which the city bought for \$1 this summer, as leaders make plans to renovate the historic buildings. "Until we do an inspection, we don't have any idea what we're dealing with," said City Councilwoman Mary Quinn.

A group of citizens and government officials is overseeing the renovation of the two buildings after the city purchased them from the Clarke County Board of Education in June. The committee arranged for an environmental hazard testing company to take samples of various materials around the buildings located on North Church Street.

The samples will be analyzed in a lab to identify any problems with the materials in the building.

"This is step one of where we have to go," said Bob White, chairman of the rehabilitation committee.

Next up, the committee will solicit quotes from architects, who will have to incorporate in their plans how to deal with any asbestos or other hazardous material that turns up in the inspection, according to White, who works at the physical plant at the University of Georgia. Those proposals likely will be due in November or December.

The cost of architectural work could range from \$125,000 to \$167,000, according to White, but actually completing the work may run \$1 million to \$1.5 million.

"Let's face it - it's going to be expensive," he said. "When you get into historic preservation, it gets real expensive."

In the meantime, city leaders will do what they can to improve the property. A fence and cracked asphalt behind the school will be removed and recycled in the next few days.

"We're trying to make it look better for the community and the environment," White said. "Hopefully, just for the cost of 20 or 30 pounds of grass seed."

Next month, locals will get a chance to tell city officials how they'd like to see the space used.

"We're in the research stages," White said. "We need to find out what the community wants to do with these buildings."

Committee members warn that the buildings can't be used for just anything - no school or a day care - because both buildings have lead paint, and removing all the paint isn't practical, he said.

Suggestions may be sent at any time via the city clerk at winterville@charter.net.

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