

Old Winterville School Restoration

Senior center plan may help land grant

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WINTERVILLE - City leaders continue to make plans to renovate the historic Winterville school building for a senior center and have agreed to apply for a \$500,000 block grant that could pay for part of the restoration.



Senior Center

Applying for the Community Development Block Grant from the state Department of Community Affairs requires the city to get building inspections, conceptual designs and a tentative floor plan. That work will cost \$8,500, but much of the work would have to be done anyway, according to Bob White, chairman of the school restoration committee.

The city acquired the school building and an opera-style auditorium last year from the Clarke County School District.

The restoration committee has been working to find a use for the school building and money to restore it.

Athens Community Council on Aging officials continue to talk with restoration committee members about becoming a long-term tenant in one section of the school building.

"The (Council on Aging) is essential as a partner to the validity of the grant," said Jo Mercer, who sits on the restoration committee. "They're a viable, established community eager to work with us to bring these programs and services to Winterville."

Council on Aging leaders are ready to start selecting existing programs that would work well in Winterville, according to Mercer.

Although the restoration committee and Council on Aging leaders haven't figured out which programs Wintervillians would like at the satellite location, the grant application doesn't require that information.

The senior center won't take up all of the two-story, 9,000-square-foot building, and the grant money only will go toward restoring the sections that house senior programs. If the city receives the grant,

restoration of those parts of the building could be completed in as little as two years, according to Mercer.

Finishing the entire building could cost the city up to \$1 million based on estimates by city engineer George Chandler, also a committee member.

The grant recipients won't be determined until October, according to Charlie Armentrout, the civil engineer who is assisting Winterville in the application.

"It will be a lot of additional work to pull this thing together," Armentrout said.

In public hearings about the building, Winterville residents said they wanted to use the buildings for senior programs. Other popular ideas included a health center, a space for Winterville's overloaded library and the relocation of city hall.

Programs for other age groups may benefit from the restoration.

"Our grant just has to focus on senior citizens to qualify," Mercer said. "The Athens Community Council on Aging has many programs that they could bring to Winterville."

The grant application requires a conceptual floor plan, not a detailed design, according to Armentrout. The Council on Aging still will have the flexibility to change programs.

"I don't think that anything that we would be doing would be cast in stone," said architectural consultant David Matheny. "It's fluid and flexible enough that we're going to be able to react to the citizens' feelings about this facility."

A public forum for citizens to provide input about the partnership and discuss which Council on Aging programs and services would work best in Winterville will be held at 7 tonight in the Winterville Depot.

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