

Phelps School facelift expected to begin in 2014

December 3, 2013

ZACH JAY - Journal Ishpeming Bureau Staff (zjay@miningjournal.net) , Journal Ishpeming Bureau

ISHPEMING - After making some minor architectural changes to site plans, the downstate development company with an agreement to buy the former C.L. Phelps School expects to begin construction next year to turn the school building into low- and moderate-income housing.

The Ishpeming Planning Commission and Zoning Board approved several conditional use permits and variances Monday to G.A. Haan Development of downstate Harbor Springs.

Haan entered a purchase agreement with the Ishpeming School District in May 2012, but Haan Development Coordinator Ben Ide said that since then the company has had a couple of minor architectural design "hiccupps."

Article Photos



Shown is the former C.L. Phelps School. G.A. Haan Dev...

"It's just taken longer than expected," he said. "Things always take longer. We've had some architectural delays which cost us some time."

Haan has received almost \$7 million in state and federal funds to purchase the building and finance construction costs. Strings attached to the money mandate that future rents are restricted, meaning that for prospective extremely low-income tenants, the amount they pay yearly in rent cannot exceed 30 percent of the area median income, which in Marquette County was \$56,800 in 2013. For potential low- and moderate-income tenants, it is 40 and 60 percent, respectively.

Haan's current plans are to lease the first floor of the building, with the gymnasium, kitchen facilities and wrestling room, to the school district for its continued use; to use the northeast portion of the second floor, which housed the former kindergarten, for a proposed day care center run by the Marquette YMCA; and to develop the rest of the second floor and the third floor into 24 apartment units for people with low to moderate incomes.

One of the conditional uses granted to the company Monday include a potential neighborhood grocery store (not selling alcohol), but Ide says that there are currently no plans to develop such a store.

"We don't intend to have a neighborhood grocery store any time soon," Ide said. "We expect that the school district will fully utilize the lower level."

He said Haan was anticipating that in the future, should the school district no longer be interested in leasing the first floor, the company wants to already have approval for some other uses for the kitchen - a catering business, for example, or a delicatessen.

As of yet, the architectural plans remain unfinished, but Ide said that the company is working on the project and hopes to both close the sale of the building and begin construction early next year.

Ide said major construction will be done to prepare the building for use.

"It'll be substantial, particularly on the interior," he said. "The biggest changes will be inside the building though, on the second and third floors. Those are going to be completely gutted and renovated into the residential units."

Zach Jay can be reached at 906-486-4401.