

## Bucksport's Gardner Commons Construction On Schedule



Written by Nick Gosling

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Gardner Commons, an elderly housing facility with supportive services, is being built on schedule according to Bucksport Town Manager Roger Raymond.—STAFF PHOTO BY NICK GOSLING

BUCKSPORT — Renovation and construction of the Gardner Commons elderly housing facility with supportive services on Elm Street is well under way by contractors Nickerson and O'Day of Brewer.

At a council meeting on Sept. 13, Town Manager Roger Raymond said construction is running on schedule and plans are to be finished by the end of this year.

Crews are currently working on the roof for the second floor and partitioning off a number of the apartments on that floor.

The town manager reported 75 to 80 percent of the partitions have been built on the second floor and Sheetrocking has begun.

Below ground piping and conduits have been installed in the gym area and a roof membrane has been built over the two-story portion of the building. Construction crews have also begun dividing the gym space into two floors with the top floor housing three apartments and a dining room and stage area located on the lower floor.

Raymond said each of the 26 apartment units planned will be almost 700 square feet in size.

The town manager said he is now preparing a grant application to finance items that were taken out of the original project because of a lack of funding, including a whirlpool room, a beauty salon, individual storage units in the basement for tenants and improvements to the kitchen.

"If we're successful getting the CDBG [Community Development Block Grant] funds, that will really allow us to complete the project like it was originally thought of," Raymond said.

When completed, the nonprofit Gardner Commons Corp. and a 10- to 11-member board of directors, which the town manager chairs, will run the facility. The Eastern Agency on Aging (EAA) is sponsoring the project and will provide support services to residents, including the Meals for Me program, legal services and community services to help tenants with paperwork, benefits and referrals.

Tenants, who must be 65 or older, will also receive a monthly stipend, which they can use to purchase housekeeping or to pay electricity and water bills, said Raymond.

EAA will be hired by the corporation to provide care management, including caseworkers who will do a case plan on every resident living there to determine the service tenants will need. Weekly transportation will also be provided to residents.

For three years now the town has been working on turning the 70-year-old former Gardner School into an elderly housing facility.

"It's called supportive services," said Raymond. "It's not assisted living, it's not congregate housing, it is supportive housing. That's why we went to that source of funding because we do not have a nursing home facility in Bucksport, so we felt that this would be an alternative to not having any facility that provides any level of service to our elderly."

EAA employees will have an office at the facility and will establish hours when they can help tenants.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, which raised \$3.6 million for the project, has approved a waiver giving area citizens preference of moving into the facility.

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