



## Scrabble School to receive \$200,000

Local

By Matt Pelkey

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A long shot grant application has paid off nicely for the initiative to restore the Scrabble School building, an historic African-American schoolhouse in Scrabble that has lain neglected for decades.

This past Monday, County Administrator John McCarthy received a letter indicating that the state will provide \$200,000 for the project. The Virginia Department of Housing and Community approved the county's application submitted this past September, awarding the maximum amount of money available per project under the grant program.

McCarthy said that the \$200,000 will be paid to the county as reimbursements as expenses are incurred.

The project, which calls for refurbishing and converting the school building into a functioning senior center and historical African-American landmark, carries an estimated price tag of \$450,000. Even with the influx of cash, the initiative is still \$100,000 short.

The Scrabble School Preservation Foundation, which is spearheading the restoration of the schoolhouse, will be working to raise funds in the next few months. McCarthy said he expects to bring the project before the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors in January, once resources are better nailed down. The board will then have the opportunity to approve plans for the site, which the county owns.

"Frankly, I'd be a lot more comfortable if that gap were narrowed to \$25 or \$50,000," McCarthy said.

But he and others involved with the restoration are confident the money will be there.

"Yes, I'm optimistic that we will because it's a community project and we've had a lot of interest in that project," said Bob Lander, president of the Scrabble School Preservation Foundation.

Lander believes that being so close to their goal of \$450,000 will encourage others to help see it met.

"It's one of the most exciting things that's happened in a long time," he said.

Plans for the the project were hatched in the mid-90s by the late Frank Warner, a Rappahannock resident and alumnus of the Scrabble School. Warner died in 2003, before he could see his dreams realized, but his wife, Dorothy Warner, and Lander took hold of the reigns.

"I am ecstatic," Dorothy said. She is now treasurer of the Scrabble School Preservation Foundation. "I really never thought we'd get to it."

The project calls for restoration of the schoolhouse, which will be converted into a senior citizen center to serve the needs of elderly in Rappahannock County. Once refurbished, the building will look much like it did when schoolchildren sat inside its walls.

The two acres the school sits on will be landscaped, walking trails added, and a garden, to be cared for by the Farm-to-Table program at the county public schools, is also slated to go in.

The refurbished building will also serve to preserve and celebrate African-American history in Rappahannock County.

"It's been a long process," Amy Silver-O'Leary, development coordinator for the Scrabble School Preservation Foundation, said.

Silver-O'Leary, a part-time and the only paid employee with the foundation, came on board about three years ago. She said the foundation was denied a large grant this past summer, though the application that the foundation used was then worked into the successful submission sent in this past September.

Prior to receiving news about the \$200,000, the foundation had lined up a spattering of smaller pots of money.

"We've gotten lot of other grants, like \$10,000 here or \$15,000 there," Silver-O'Leary said. "Its hard to make them add up to \$450,000."

She said that the Scrabble School project was a long shot to qualify for the state grant, but that the Department of Housing and Community worked closely with the group to develop the application.

The group also had a helping hand from the senior services group Aging Together, legislators, the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Planning Commission, and former U.S. Representative Ben "Cooter" Jones, Silver-O'Leary said.

"There are a million people who made this happen," she said.

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