

Housing Council plans 'green' rebuilding work

BUILDING GUTTED: Agency seeking funding for mold cleanup; long-term debt expected

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CANTON — The St. Lawrence County Housing Council is working to turn a crisis in its building into a "green" model that converts its home into the space it has always wanted.

The Housing Council, a nonprofit agency, is working with its national underwriter, NeighborWorks, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and banks on a \$320,000 funding package that will enable it to pay for the \$92,000 mold cleanup it is completing and a pending renovation that will include a first-floor classroom and conference rooms, and remodeling of its second-floor for offices.

"We've had to really strip the building. We're going to take advantage of that," council spokesman David R. Weissbard said. "We're going to turn lemons into lemonade, but we're going to be financially challenged because we've had the expense of removing the mold."

The Housing Council moved all of its 19 employees out of 19 Main St. on Sept. 29 after many of them experienced physical ailments associated with mold. To rid the building of spores, a contractor removed ceiling tiles, wallboard, heating ducts and interior wood siding, so what is left is basically a shell.

Insurance did not cover the mold cleanup. Despite the cost, the Housing Council decided to commit to the Main Street building, especially since its other options were not better. It could have purchased another building on Main Street, but still would have remodeling costs, and did not want to leave its home behind. New construction was beyond its budget, Executive Director Joseph D. DeMart said.

With a certified clean building, the Housing Council is working with restoration architect Rebecca Weld, Potsdam, and a consultant provided by NeighborWorks on a plan for an environmentally friendly design that will put most employee offices on the second floor, accessible by interior stairs. "We've had to go outdoors to go to the second floor," Mr. Weissbard said. Staff will meet with the public on the first floor. If the Housing Council hires people who are handicapped, their offices can be on the first floor.

The design also will focus on high-quality air exchange and a lack of chemicals in building materials. "It's a very doable plan for us, although we will be strapped with a long-term debt," Mr. DeMart said.

The Housing Council will conduct an informal campaign asking for donations. "It's probably just going to be a letter expressing our need and asking for support," Mr. DeMart said.

The Housing Council hopes the remodeling can be completed by summer. Until then, it is renting 49 Main St., where it also is taking over the upstairs.