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FEATURED

Demolition of one-story portion of 'The Rock' happening next week

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The one-story portion of the former Sandstone School that faces Court Avenue North is scheduled for demolition next week.

Photo by Dan Grandmaison

Work on the reuse of the former Sandstone High School, known as "The Rock," is moving forward.

Meghan Elliott, with Jillpine, a real estate development company that works with high-potential historic properties, explained the Sandstone High School project is being divided into three phases and the project is currently in phase one, which is getting the building ready.

"So we're cleaning it up, we're putting a new roof on it and we're demolishing just the one-story portion that faces Court Avenue North," Elliott said. "And that's just really the process for getting the building ready for any reuse. All those things would have to happen no matter who uses the building for anything."

Elliott said the demolition of the one-story portion of the school is planned for approximately next Monday, Feb. 19. The new roof will be constructed April through June/July.

Elliott explained after the new roof goes on, the building needs to dry for a while. After that, the next step will be removing all the hazardous materials from the building, which will take place through the end of 2024

Part of the project includes a housing conversion, which Elliott hopes to start in 2025 depending on funding resources and design work. Elliott explained the classrooms inside the school will be converted into 31 apartments, which will consist of 19, two-bedroom apartments; 10, one-bedroom apartments; and two studio apartments.

"The apartments are work-force housing which is targeted at people who are working here in Pine County and working here in Sandstone," Elliott said. "Which means that they will have a rent that's based on someone whose making 60 to 80 percent of what's called the area median income. So it's intended that the people who live there will be the people who work in Sandstone."

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Elliott is excited to get the housing constructed started.

“It will take probably 18 months to do the construction, so maybe we’re looking at 2026 of having the construction complete for the housing,” Elliott said. “In the meantime, the city is working with the Sandstone History and Art Center to see if it would be viable to move the Sandstone History and Art Center from their current location to the auditorium ... We will be asking the Minnesota Legislature this year for support of that auditorium reuse for the Sandstone History and Art Center.”

Elliott spent a lot of time visiting with larger employers in the area about their needs before deciding on workforce housing.

“Everyone said we need more people to come work for our business but we can’t hire any new people because there’s no place for them to live,” Elliott said. “So the employer is saying they can’t grow because they can’t get more people here. And then the people are saying we can’t come there because there’s no place for us to live.”

Elliott said seeing work begin on the project is exciting.

“It’s always a really big deal to go from paper to actually seeing the on site work; that’s a really big moment,” Elliott said. “I’m really excited to see what the building looks like from Court Avenue once the one-story portion is gone. Since 1958, that side of the school has been blocked with the one-story addition and now with the one-story addition gone, you’ll be able to see that beautiful three-story sandstone facade again that you haven’t been able to see since 1958.”