

Facade removal nears

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ONEONTA _ The removal of the aluminum facade of the former Bresee's may start next month.

The Otsego County Development Corporation is planning to put the project out to bid within the next week, OCDC administrator Carolyn Lewis said Monday.

"We are just tweaking the bid specs," said Lewis, who is also the county's economic developer.

Once the invitation to bid is advertised, it will take two-to-three weeks to get the bids back and have one selected by OCDC, Lewis said.

The actual removal of the facade, which has hidden the brick face of the Main Street complex since 1959, is expected to take three or four weeks, she said.

The 75,000-square-foot complex at 155-161 Main St. has sat largely vacant for more than 10 years, and has significant roof damage and other structural problems.

The complex's former owner, Maurice Ramos, donated it in 2007 to the National Emergency Medicine Association, a nonprofit medical-education organization, in exchange for a tax break. The city is leasing the complex from OCDC for \$1 a year after city and OCDC officials engineered a transfer-of-title agreement with NEMA.

OCDC is the county's oldest nonprofit economic development organization.

The removal of the facade is a preliminary step in a larger renovation project at the complex that Lewis said could begin as early as next spring.

The project has an estimated cost of about \$6 million, and the leading options include the creation of between 20 and 30 apartments on the first, second or third floors, according to Bloomfield/Schon, the firm hired last year by OCDC to do the renovation.

Some of the space created would be used for parking, and the city is also considering changes to the Wall Street area behind the complex.

"It's going to take a while to put the whole finance package together," Lewis said.

Lewis said OCDC and city officials are waiting to hear about additional state funding that may be available for the project.

The city has already received about \$2 million in state grants for the project.

Lewis said the aluminum from the facade will be set aside for possible use during the redevelopment.