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How Portsmouth plans to fund $10 million Community Campus purchase

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PORTSMOUTH — City Manager Karen Conard is expected on Monday to ask the City Council to set a public hearing on a proposed bonding resolution to purchase the Community Campus and 34 acres of land around it.

Conard will ask the City Council to hold the public hearing Dec. 20, according to a memo from Acting Deputy City Manager Suzanne Woodland.

“The total purchase price of the Community Campus is $10 million, and this is the total amount that the city is requesting be authorized to spend in the resolution,” Woodland said.

City leaders have not yet decided nor had any formal public discussions on how the property, located on West Road off of Route 1, will be used.

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Woodland in her memo explained in more detail where the $10 million purchase funds will come from. She cited “$6.76 million from various sources to include trusts and recently received ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds from the federal government."

The ARPA funds came from the March federal stimulus bill to help America recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The city's School Department is waiting to get final approval from the New Hampshire Department of Education to use about $2 million in ESSER Funds (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund) to go toward the Community Campus purchase, Woodland said.

“The city is seeking an authorization for bonding of up to $3.25 million to fund the remaining portion of the Community Campus purchase,” Woodland said in a memo to the City Council. “If the school is not able to obtain permission to utilize the $2 million in funding from ESSER, the city will bond all $3.25 million to complete the purchase. If the school is able to obtain permission, the city will only be bonding $1.25 million to complete the purchase.”

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The City Council voted unanimously in September to allow Conard to negotiate a purchase-and-sale agreement for the city to buy the Community Campus facility and land around it.

City officials reached a tentative deal shortly before then to purchase the property from the Foundation For Seacoast Health.

When the deal was announced, city and foundation officials said the tenants that operate out of the Community Campus off West Road will be allowed to stay after the sale goes through.

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Conard said she expects to close on the sale by the end of January.

The property, she said previously, “should serve a variety of uses for the city.”

“It’s truly an opportunity of a lifetime, as has been said before,” Conard said.

In addition to the request to schedule the public hearing on the $10 million purchase, Conard is also asking the City Council to approve “a supplemental appropriation of $116,000” to “cover operation and maintenance expenses” at the Community Campus, Woodland said.

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“These monies will cover utilities, custodial services and maintenance of the facility. Future budgets will be developed based on the city’s actual operations expenses once staff have fully programmed the campus and existing contracted service agreements have expired,” Woodland said.

Conard is expected to seek permission to hold another public hearing on Dec. 20 for that appropriation, Woodland said.

Monday’s council meeting is slated to begin at 7 p.m. and will be held in City Council Chambers in City Hall.