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CENTERPIECE

## Eastham House New City Nonprofit Hub

Four Organizations To Share Historic House

By VIC BRADSHAW Daily News-Record 10 hrs ago



George Lehman (left) and Brian Smith, subcontractors for Sustainable Solutions, renovate a deck of the historic Eastham House on South Main Street in Harrisonburg on Tuesday.

Daniel Lin / DN-R

**HARRISONBURG** — The construction work at 317 S. Main St. isn't just about restoring a historic house. It's about creating a new hub for community philanthropy.

Revlan Hill, executive director of The Community Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, said the organization is planning to move into its new digs in the Eastham House in November, but it won't be alone. Four additional local nonprofits will call the house home, too, and there's room for more.

The new space will resolve multiple issues for the foundation, including a need for first-floor office space and room to expand, while keeping the nonprofit in the middle of downtown Harrisonburg.

"I think continuing to be on Main Street downtown provides an avenue for folks to see what The Community Foundation is," Hill said, "and we'll continue to build assets to support the nonprofits in this community and support the donors in this community."

The foundation operates out of the second floor at 311 S. Main St., home of the Arts Council of the Valley, but she said a ground-level space is needed because some donors can't climb the stairs.

In October, City Council voted to donate the building to the foundation under the conditions that it be restored and the city has the right of first refusal if it's ever sold.

When it opens, the building will be called the Plecker Center for Community Philanthropy.

Lined up to lease space in the building, Hill said, are Way to Go, which provides transportation assistance for low-income workers; Autumn Valley Guardianship, a public guardianship organization; Court Appointed Special Advocates, which provides legal advocacy for abused or neglected children; and the local Alzheimer's Association.

Three more offices are available for local nonprofits.

#### Extensive Project

Built in the 1890s, the 6,700-square-foot Eastham House is named for former owner George Eastham, a businessman who served in the 12th Virginia Cavalry under Gen. Turner Ashby during the Civil War. He bought the structure in 1906.

It was the Homestead Inn in the 1950s, and the Harrisonburg City School Board later called it home. Most recently, the city's information technology department was housed there.

The project is as much reclamation as it is a renovation. According to Hill, the basement leaked; the pipes were failing; the rear porch was deteriorating; and the walls, floors and ceilings had been covered and re-covered multiple times.

Add in the lack of a modern heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system and the presence of asbestos, lead-based paint and mold, and local contractor Sustainable Solutions faced a tall task when it started work April 1.

"It's a pretty extensive renovation for that house," said Melissa Mayhew, the foundation's accounting director.

That adds up to a \$945,000 project, including professional fees and all ancillary costs, but The Community Foundation isn't footing the full bill. The Richmond-based Cabell Foundation provided a grant to pay 30 percent of the cost, and Farmers & Merchants Bank bought state historic tax credits that cover about 25 percent.

Ann Siciliano, the foundation's director of program services, is overseeing the project.

She said the main and upper floors had been covered by carpet for years. They were pleased when they found hardwood floors underneath it.

"They are intact and gorgeous. We didn't have to do much repair," Siciliano said. "That was a nice surprise."

Sustainable Solutions, she said, has done a good job of reusing as much original material from the structure as possible to help maintain the building's historical integrity. In raising the porch to accommodate a wheelchair lift, it reused all the existing decking it could salvage.

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