

# black, white & red all over

a River Edge community newsletter

## Challenges For the American Legion Hall

When the River Edge Town Council purchased the American Legion Hall on Continental Avenue, it was touted as the home of a future senior/community center. Unfortunately, the property was purchased as is and without a full professional inspection of the condition. Nor was there a detailed renovation plan and cost estimate prepared for its development into a senior center.

The current building, purchased for \$425,000, is in very serious disrepair. Last September, an architecture firm asked by then-Councilman Tom Smith to assess the building reported that the building did not meet the criteria for public assembly, that the space was too small for intended use as a senior/community center, and the town could easily need to invest \$1-\$1.5 million to renovate and expand the building for code and ADA compliance (handicapped accessible) and complete suitability (Council Meeting tapes, 9/7/10).

A Community Development Block Grant of about \$105,000 was applied for to finance 25% of the purchase price, the rest (about \$320,000) being financed through a bond by the town. The grant restricts the use of the building to a senior center, with only rare exceptions for its use for other groups. The initial grant could be rescinded if the town violates this restriction.

The town taxpayers must pay interest and ultimately the principal on the bond used to finance its portion of the purchase price and any other financing required to rehabilitate the property. Full development and expansion of the facility will require substantial additional funding. With government finances at all levels stressed for the foreseeable future, grants will not be available in the amounts previously. This year's regional grant program is already in jeopardy of losing large amounts of funding. Grants also come with restrictions such as the one placed on the American Legion Hall as a "senior-only" center.

*(Story continued on next page.)*

### American Legion Hall – The Facts

**Purchase by Town:** 2009

**Purchase Price:** \$425,000

**Proposed Funding Source:** River Edge Taxpayers Bond (75%), Community Development Block Grant (25%)

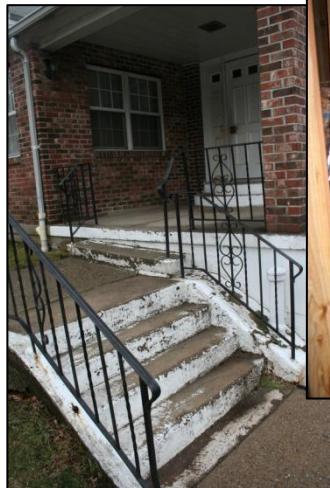
**Restrictions on Grant:** Building must be operated as a senior center only

#### **Current Floor Plan:**

- Exterior steps to first floor and basement entranceways
- First Floor – foyer, gathering room, kitchen, sunken sunroom, no bathrooms
- Interior steep staircases to second floor and basement
- Second Floor – office and meeting rooms, bathrooms
- Basement – bar and recreation gathering space, bathrooms, storage, utilities

#### **Estimated Costs For Complete Repair, Renovation and Expansion:**

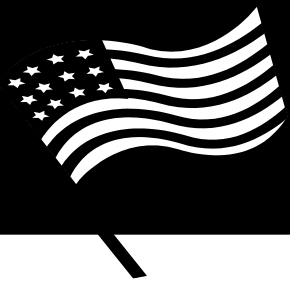
As much as **\$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000** based on an architecture firm's recorded testimony before the Town Council.



*Building is not ADA compliant (handicapped accessible) and serious mold and water damage conditions exist throughout the basement*



*Kitchen, A/C, ventilation and heating equipment needs replacement*



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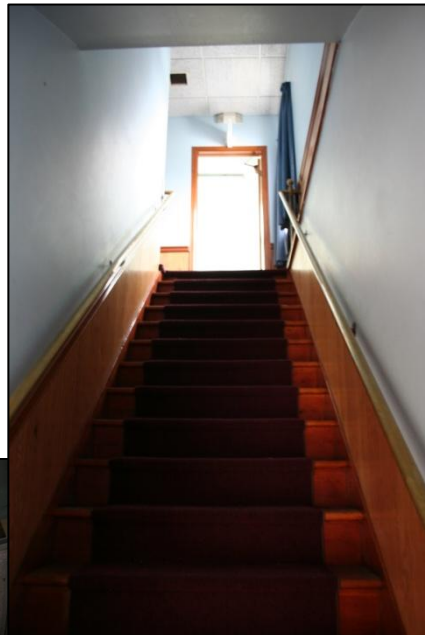
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## Challenges For the American Legion Hall

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Some recent renovation cost estimates being put forward by former Council members are far from complete. These estimates of around \$300,000 are predicated on achieving the barest minimum level of code and ADA compliance and do not reflect realistic costs needed to develop a fully suitable facility. By not addressing issues such as the overall space inadequacy, kitchen modernization, HVAC replacement or the lack of bathrooms on the first floor, these estimates cannot be taken seriously. **To mislead the town's people, especially seniors, that a chairlift in the steep staircase to the existing second floor bathrooms is an acceptable renovation and expenditure of grant and taxpayer funds is unconscionable and shameful.**

The current Town Council stands at a critical crossroads as to how to proceed with the American Legion Hall building. Further complicating matters, it is estimated that operating costs for snow removal, grounds upkeep, utilities, insurance and maintenance and other items for the building *as is* may run as much as \$25,000 per year. The Council's decisions regarding the building's fate will be difficult and probably not popular with some. However, they will be decisions that are reasoned, informed, practical and mature. At this time of severe municipal budget cuts, renovating, maintaining and operating the existing American-Legion-Hall-turned-River-Edge-Senior-Center may not be feasible or practical, no matter how much we would all like it to happen.



*Basement bathrooms are unusable and no bathrooms exist on the main floor; steep staircase leads to second floor bathrooms; walls, floors and ceilings need replacement*

### American Legion Hall – The Facts

(continued)

#### **Condition of Building:**

- Existing first floor space is too small for modern senior/community center and expansion is required
- Serious mold condition in basement
- Active water leaks in basement
- Basement floor, walls, ceilings require total renovation
- Poor and degraded insulation in roof and walls
- Entire kitchen modernization required, including appliances, ventilation and fire suppression
- Audio/visual equipment antiquated
- No sprinkler system
- Asbestos and lead hazard abatement probable
- Windows and doors – exterior and interior – in disrepair
- Floors need replacement/resurfacing throughout building
- All HVAC systems require replacement
- No handicapped access or ADA compliance
- No bathrooms on first floor
- Roof in need of repair
- Other problems yet to be identified

#### **Estimated Costs For Complete Repair, Renovation and Expansion:**

as much as **\$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000** based on an architecture firm's recorded testimony before the Town Council.