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Board taps contractor to finish renovations

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FRONT ROYAL -- Work toward converting the former Samuels Public Library building into a community center is set to begin after the Warren County Board of Supervisors picked a contractor on Wednesday to complete the renovations.

The supervisors unanimously voted to select Hammerhead Construction of Virginia Inc., the firm that submitted the lowest of 12 bids for renovations to the one-story, 9,280-square-foot building that sits on 1.53 acres at 538 Villa Ave. In fact, Hammerhead Construction's bid of \$314,900 was more than \$262,000 below the previously estimated \$577,198 figure officials had anticipated for construction costs, Deputy County Administrator Richard J. Magnifico said.

Once it's refurbished, the community center will be used by Warren County Public Schools and the Parks and Recreation Department. The alterations will mainly consist of reconfiguring partitions and doors throughout the building to create classrooms, offices and meeting spaces. Bathrooms in the facility will also be upgraded to meet current accessibility requirements.

"[The contractors] are anxious to start. They just needed to get the contract. I didn't want to send them the contract until the board approved it," Magnifico said.

School officials intend to use some rooms inside the community center for instructional purposes. "We'll also be able to use the computer classrooms for adult classes for computer instruction," Magnifico said. "There's a need for [the] space."

The former Samuels Public Library on Villa Avenue, which had been operating since 1980, has been replaced by a new 27,500-square-foot building at 330 E. Criser Road. The new building, which opened this past summer, was built primarily to address overcrowding issues and increase the size of the library's collections. In September, the supervisors approved a 20-year lease agreement reached with the Samuels Public Library board of trustees for the old building, a pact that includes free rent and an option for an automatic 10-year extension. Renovations to the building will begin this month, Magnifico said.

Also on Wednesday, the supervisors authorized County Administrator Douglas P. Stanley to sign a contract with Springsted Inc. for the purpose of conducting a study of the Economic Development Authority's funding formula. The current formula was adopted by county and Town of Front Royal officials in 1996. However, the model used to develop the formula needs to be updated because of changes that have occurred in the community in the past eight years, Stanley said.

"There are a number of factors that have changed, including tax rates and the provision of water and sewer service by the town in the [U.S.] 340-522 corridor with a service charge in-line with the in-town tax rate," Stanley says in a memo outlining the need for the study. County officials also adopted a meals tax that went into effect in January 2004.

Last year, the county issued a request for proposals to hire a consultant to review and update the

economic benefits system to better enable officials to estimate costs and benefits that are likely to result from the development of commercial and industrial projects within town and county limits, Stanley said. Springsted will complete the study at a cost not to exceed \$6,000. The proposal, however, must also be approved by the Town Council.

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