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Berkshire Family YMCA plans \$5M overhaul for historic North Street complex



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Months have been spent planning for an estimated \$5 million renovation of the Berkshire Family YMCA in Pittsfield. Proponents of the project say it will help revitalize that section of Pittsfield's downtown, likening it to major anchor projects like those surrounding the Colonial Theatre and Barrington Stage.

IMAGE PROVIDED BY BERKSHIRE FAMILY YMCA



Posted Saturday, March 23, 2019 7:51 pm

By Amanda Drane, The Berkshire Eagle

PITTSFIELD — You wouldn't know the Berkshire Family YMCA was there unless you looked for it.

That realization occurred to the organization's president and CEO, Randy Kinnas, one summer day in 2017 as he met with a donor at Hotel on North. The donor glanced across the street at the historic brick building that quietly houses the North Street mainstay and wondered aloud about what was inside it.

"That was it. Then the lightbulb went off," Kinnas said.

That moment sparked months of planning for an estimated \$5 million renovation project aimed at opening up the building, making it more inviting and visible from North Street. The project, set to begin in early 2020, focuses on replacing much of the building's brick exterior with glass.

Proponents of the project say it will help revitalize that section of Pittsfield's downtown, likening it to major anchor projects like those surrounding the Colonial Theatre and Barrington Stage.

"It's going to be the talk of the town for some time, this project," said Matt Scarafoni, a member of the board at Berkshire Family YMCA.

Scarafoni and Kinnas are spearheading the project, which Kinnas said also entails revamping the organization's classrooms, relocating the fitness center, adding a fresh basketball court — complete with an indoor walking track — and making the building more efficient.

The plan is to move the fitness center to where the gymnasium currently resides, Scarafoni said.

He draws on his experience at Scarafoni Financial-Berkshire Fairfield as the nonprofit embarks on a fundraising initiative for the project, with a final price tag expected to land at \$5 million to \$6 million.

"We have met with a significant amount of large donors who have embraced the project and are excited to support it ...," Scarafoni said. "We are very confident that we are going to be able to raise the money that we need going forward."

Hill Engineering is working on the project, Scarafoni said, and Skanska USA is the project manager. The project requires a contractor, he said, and a bid is going out soon.

Kinnas said he filed a \$200,000 request with the city's Community Preservation Commission for help removing bricks placed over large windows along the Melville Street side of the building. He said the windows were installed with the original building, when it was built for the YMCA in 1909, but were later bricked in during the late 1960s or early '70s.

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The goal is to allow more natural light to enter the building and to restore that section's architecture to its original intent.

"We feel that this entire renovation will open up our building, make us more visible and enhance our membership going forward," Kinnas said.

The south side of the building — it's the part that extends to the corner of North and Melville streets — was built later, in the 1980s, Scarafoni said. They plan to retain the brick facade on the historic portion and remake the exterior of the newer addition with glass paneling.

Kinnas said he plans to launch the project in phases over the course of 2020 so that he can keep the building open to the public. He might have to close the basketball court for a time, he said, but he's shooting to do that piece in summer 2020, so people can make use of outside alternatives.

Scarafoni said the investment is significant, and so is the amount of time and effort that he and other YMCA leaders have put into it.

"This project is a game changer for downtown," he said. "It's just one more piece of the puzzle to make downtown more vibrant."

In the end, Scarafoni said, they'll have created a "state-of-the-art" health and fitness center for people of all segments of the socioeconomic spectrum. The plan is to boost revenue by expanding capacity and making the facilities more universally attractive, and then using the additional revenue to give out more scholarships to low-income residents.

As it stands, he said, the nonprofit gives out \$350,000 a year in free memberships.

"This is not just a paint job and an upgrade," he said. "This is a game changer for our business model and how we serve Berkshire County."

Ancillary benefits include more opportunities for downtown apartment dwellers, and more fuel to the argument for a new Columbus Avenue parking garage, Scarafoni said.

"The social impact of this project will reverberate through the entire community," Scarafoni said.

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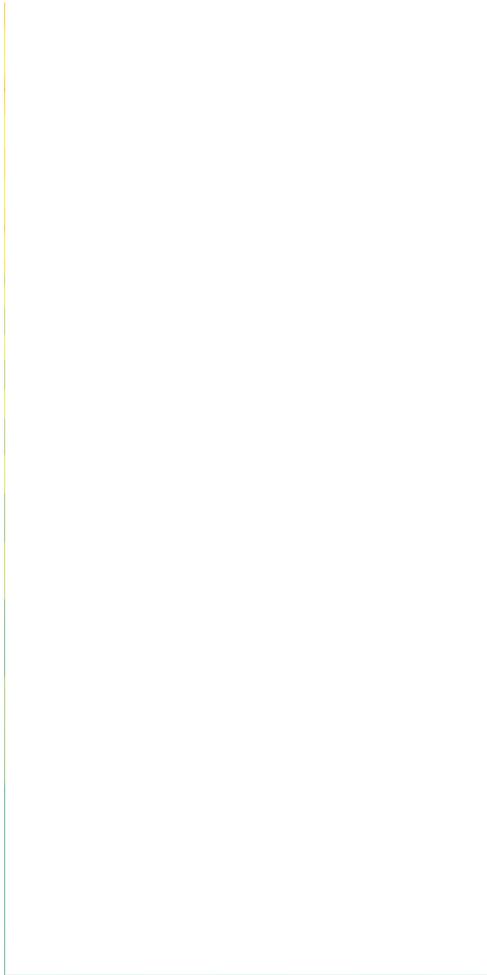
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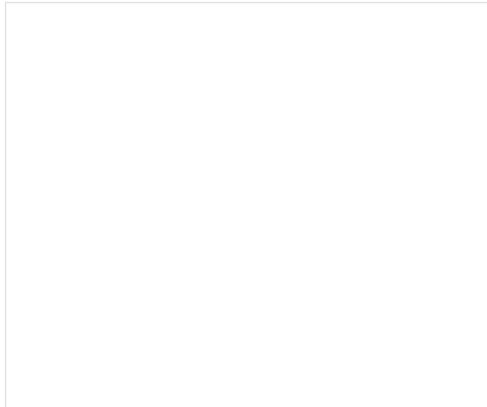
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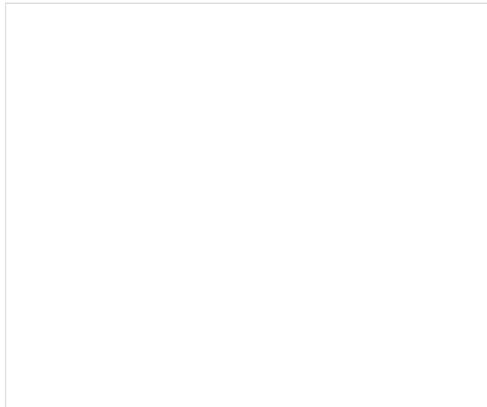
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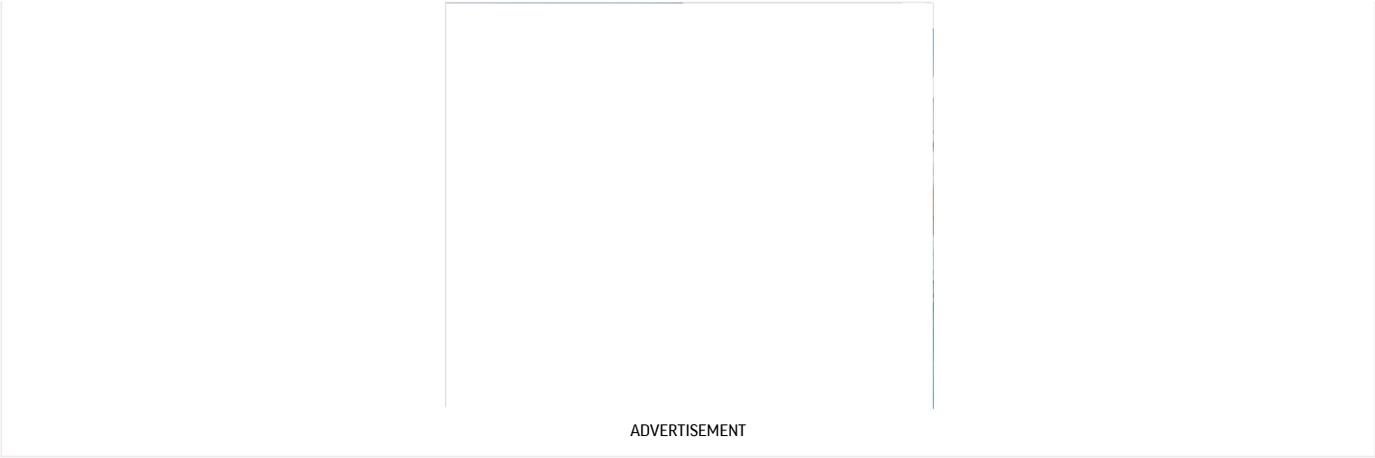
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