

New Easton senior center near opening

By Joel C. Thompson
STAFF WRITER

EASTON — A contractor is making final touches to the town's new senior citizen center, making way for its opening later this month in the former Staples Elementary School on Morehouse Road.

"Painting is under way and carpeting is being installed," said Valerie Buckley, the center's director. "We've already begun to move in some things. We'll be able to occupy it by the end of the month."

Buckley said AI Engineers, the general contractor, has only some final details to address on the project, which began with demolition last May. She said the center will celebrate the opening of its new space in April.

The \$1.72 million project involved converting 12 classrooms on the main floor of the former school into program spaces, a kitchen and offices for the center.

Officials of the senior center, for a number of years located on the ground floor of the old school, sought to expand several years ago.

The director said the project began to take shape in 2001 after her husband, Town Clerk Derek Buckley, discovered that state Small Town Economic Assistance Program grants

might be available.

The \$1.72 million included two STEAP grants, one for \$500,000 and the other for \$400,000, along with a \$750,000 federal small cities grant and \$75,000 in town matching funds for consulting work.

Valerie Buckley said the town and the center also sought \$219,510 in state bond money for the project, but it has probably been eliminated from the state budget.

That money would have been spent for new floors, such as in the corridors, as well as for shelving and cabinets — items that have been trimmed for lack of funds, she said.

Even so, First Selectman Tom Herrmann and the center's leaders have decided to seek an equivalent amount of "shovel ready" federal stimulus funding so that work can be done, Buckley said.

Meanwhile, the center raised about \$60,000 for furnishings, including \$40,000 from the William Morris Foundation, \$10,000 from the Paul Newman Foundation, \$4,000 from the Easton Lions Club and several donations from private citizens.

The Easton Police Benevolent Association has decided to donate a flagpole for the center.