

Claremont Closer to Grant Approval

By Patrick O'Grady
Valley News Correspondent
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Claremont — The New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority's advisory committee has recommended approval of two \$500,000 Community Development Block Grants to help renovate and upgrade three downtown properties.

If approved by the governor and executive council, possibly next month, the grants would help finance rehabilitation of the Farwell Block and an adjacent building on Opera House Square and the Goddard Block on Pleasant Street.

Claremont's planning and development director, Nancy Merrill, said she is hopeful the approvals will be finalized because the grants are necessary pieces for the planned redevelopment.

"If the grant (for the Farewell Block) is approved, it will be the difference between doing the project and not doing the project," Merrill said. "This is a big step forward."

Most of the grant would pay for the installation of an elevator at the rear of the Farwell Block to service that building and the adjacent 56 Opera House Square, a vacant three-story building next to City Hall and the Opera House that was last used as a restaurant more than 25 years ago.

The city already received a \$150,000 grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission and now has a combined \$650,000 toward an estimated project cost of \$1.5 million for both properties, Merrill said.

Merrill said a feasibility study estimated it will cost \$500,000 for interior renovations on the second floor of the Farwell Block, for the new home of a community dental center and the same amount to renovate 56 Opera House Square, where the West Claremont Center for Music and the Arts is expected to move.

The dental center is currently in the basement of the Farwell Block with an entrance Tremont Street.