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## **Bridgewater's McElwain School will get new lease on life**

**By Corlyn Voorhees The Enterprise**

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The developers who purchased the McElwain School plan to restore the building and create 57 mixed-income rental units on the property, as well as a park and plaza for community use.

BRIDGEWATER -- The McElwain School has sat vacant for more than 20 years, but by 2021, the property will be redeveloped to create 57 new mixed-income rental units.

The developers who purchased the school -- MPZ Development LLC and Capstone Communities Development LLC -- will hold a community information session on Tuesday to present their plans for the project and take input from residents. The meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. and will take place at the Bridgewater Public Library.

"We think that Bridgewater is a really great community," said Matt Zahler, principal and project manager of MPZ Development. Zahler is partnering with Jason Korb, principal of Capstone Communities Development, for the project. "There are a lot of people who have a real need for high-quality housing which is what we're going to be building here."

Their plans are to restore the McElwain School and turn it into a 16-unit residential building. They also plan to construct a new 38-unit residential building behind the school, renovate a three-unit single-family house purchased next door to the property to be included in the project and add a park and plaza for the community to use.

The 57 units will consist of 19 one-bedroom units, 31 two-bedroom units and seven three-bedroom units. There will be 80 parking spots for residents with five additional spots designated for the park.

Total development costs are currently estimated at \$21.7 million, Zahler said.

Zahler and Korb signed the purchase and sale agreement with the town last June, Zahler said, and agreed to purchase the property for \$645,000.

Fitzgerald Appraisers, located in North Easton, appraised the property for the town in August 2017 and valued it at \$970,000. That appraisal didn't take into consideration the "considerable amount of hazardous materials" that need to be taken out of the building, such as asbestos, Zahler said, which resulted in the lowered price.

In addition to the McElwain School property, Zahler and Korb also purchased a three-unit property next door, located at 242 Main St., in a separate private sale. The property will be kept as three units, but will be renovated and included in the project.

One of the goals is to preserve the history of the school, Zahler said. The McElwain School was added to the National Register of Historic Places in January 2013.

"It's in pretty bad shape but with a nice historic renovation, we can bring it back to life," he said. "I think [the project] is going to be great for the town and the people who live there."

Zahler is hoping for a large turnout at the public hearing to get feedback before they formally start the permitting process, which will take several months, he said. He expects construction to start in January 2020 and finish by the beginning of summer 2021.

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