

Grant will help revive building

Fernwood plans suites over retail businesses

BY MALCOLM CURTIS
Times Colonist staff

The Fernwood Community Centre Society in Victoria has moved a step farther in its plan to breathe new life into the historic Cornerstone Building at 1301 Gladstone Ave.

The two-storey structure, across from the Belfry Theatre, was boarded up recently after authorities declared it unfit for habitation. It was built between 1909 and 1911.

Now city council has agreed to donate \$50,000 to help the community centre society restore the building, which the non-profit organization recently acquired for \$1.3 million.

The money will go toward a \$300,000 project to create four affordable three-bedroom apartments on the upper floor.

"We're hoping that with the city being the first one in, we'll be able to secure other funding," said Roberta Martell, the centre's executive director.

The organization is chasing grants from the federal Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program and the Capital Regional District's regional housing trust fund.

The society, which operates a facility with child care and community services a



The Fernwood Community Centre Society is getting a \$50,000 city grant to help build affordable suites in this empty building. *Bruce Stotesbury/Times Colonist*

block away, plans to put a bakery, bistro and cafe on the ground floor of the structure.

Martell said community work parties, involving up to 50 neighbourhood residents at a time, have put in "sweat equity" to help restore the building. This is playing a key role, she said, in revitalizing the heart of the neighbourhood that had been plagued by drug dealing and petty crime.

Part of the plan is to retrofit the building to allow for solar heating, Martell said.

Council is dipping into its affordable-housing fund to help finance the housing portion of the Cornerstone renovations. Councillors were unanimous in their support of the project, though a policy hasn't been approved yet for the fund.

"A remarkable effort ... has gone into this," said Coun. Helen Hughes.