

Roof repair project begins

Prep work slated for entire winter

By Donna Boynton TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

GRAFTON— With winter approaching, preparation for the One Grafton Common roof repair project is under way.

The Board of Selectmen signed a contract with Crocker Architectural Sheet Metal of North Oxford in mid-October, and two preconstruction meetings have been held with representatives from Grafton; architects Dixon-Salo Associates; Carol DiNinno, program administrator for the Massachusetts Historical Commission; and Apple Tree Arts.

Preparation work is expected to continue throughout the winter, with construction to start in the spring. Construction must be completed by June to meet the requirements of the state grant.

“To have the roof repaired is the first step in the potential lease of that building, and future home of Apple Tree Arts,” said Donna Blanchard, executive director of Apple Tree Arts, in a statement. “It is the first step in a restoration project. You can’t do anything until that is protected.”

The roof repair is a collaborative project between the town and Apple Tree Arts. Apple Tree Arts is funded largely through a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission that was obtained by the organization.

Apple Tree Arts is negotiating a lease with the town for One Grafton Common. The grant funds are supplemented by \$100,000 from the town and \$68,000 from the Grafton Community Preservation Committee.

One Grafton Common still has its original roof, which has been repaired. However, leaks have damaged the building, and the roof must be completely replaced.

Townpeople at town meeting last year said that they wanted to keep the historic building, despite the fact that more than \$2 million in repairs were needed. Shortly after that town meeting poll, Apple Tree Arts, a nonprofit arts organization, proposed leasing the building for performing arts space. Apple Tree Arts also offered to seek grants for the building repairs for which the town itself is not eligible.

Apple Tree Arts applied for and received a \$50,000 grant for the roof repair project earlier this year; however, that grant, combined with funds set aside by the town and the Community Preservation Committee, was \$19,000 below the lowest bid received for the project.

Apple Tree Arts — with assistance from Sen. Edward M. Augustus, D-Worcester, and Rep. George N. Peterson, R-Grafton — applied for and received an emergency grant from the state Historical Commission in order to accept that contract bid.

“The state believed so much in this project that they gave that additional money and so quickly, too,” said Dana Wilson of Apple Tree Arts. “This represents the culmination of more than a year of work writing grants and strategizing with town officials.”

Once the roof is repaired, the building will be restored in phases. The second phase will be the installation of an elevator and the enclosure of two staircases, after which the building will be handicapped accessible.

Apple Tree Arts also has applied for a grant through the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund Grant administered through the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Meanwhile, the town and Apple Tree Arts are still hammering out the terms of a lease agreement so the arts group can use the building as a performing arts center.