

Andover/North Andover YMCA's \$23M renovation almost complete

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ANDOVER — After nearly two years, Andover/North Andover YMCA Executive Director Alex Turek can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Over the course of the last 20 months, Turek has helped oversee the \$23 million renovation and expansion of the YMCA center, a project which will improve the amenities of the existing building and add nearly 50,000 square feet of space.

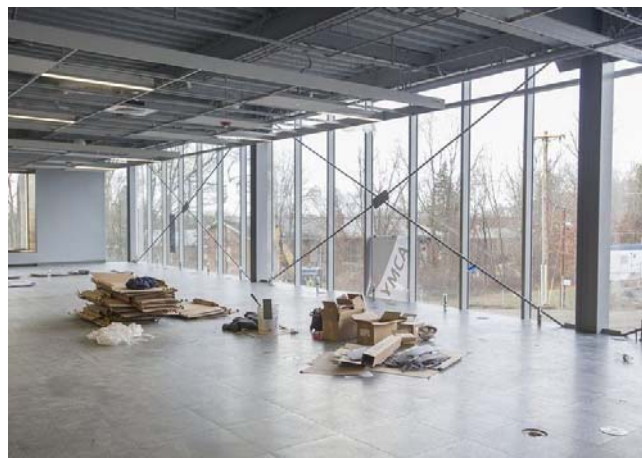
The YMCA, 165 Haverhill St., first opened in 1974. While the building has undergone several small renovations over the decades, the recent project marks the first major makeover for the building in its 41 years.

“We’ve been working on this (project) for about 18 months, but we’ve really been talking about it for 10 years,” Turek said Thursday. “It’s been a long process, but we’re almost at the end, and I think our members are going to be thrilled with the results.”

Turek and James Kapelson, vice president of membership development and marketing for the YMCA, said the 104,138 square foot building will be completed by the beginning of January.

During a tour of the building Thursday, the two showcased the YMCA’s new features, including an expanded wellness center, a learning center for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education and a rehabilitation center operated by trainers and practitioners from Lawrence General Hospital.

An early preview of the renovations came in June, when the YMCA held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new child care center for preschool and school-age students. Before the project, students were dispersed in various locations throughout the building for their programs, but the 7,700 square-foot center puts all the students in one, dedicated space, making it easier for parents to pick their children up at the end of the day.



Building a bright future

AMANDA SABGA/ Staff photo The new main cardio area of the Andover/North Andover YMCA which is in the final few stages of its \$23 million renovation project.

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The child care center operates on the first floor of the building, which will also house an Active Learning Center where third and fourth-grade students can participate in a curriculum created by Merrimack College professors. According to Turek, the Merrimack curriculum requires students to participate in various movement-based exercises designed to help improve their STEM test scores.

Next to the learning center will be a brand-new kitchen, where the YMCA will teach cooking classes to both adults and children. The kitchen will partially replace the current main entrance lobby, as the main entrance moves to the new building, a wrap-around, two-story glass wing which will house the YMCA's new wellness center.

The wellness center will stretch two floors, according to Turek, with roughly \$750,000 worth of new treadmills, workout bikes and weight-lifting equipment for members to use. There will also be new locker rooms, including a family locker room, a necessary service the YMCA did not offer before.

"We're really excited to have a family locker room," Turek said. "If fathers come with their daughters, or mothers come with their sons, it allows them to change together instead of separately in their own locker rooms. There was a real need for it before, and we wanted to make sure it would be part of the new building."

Other new additions include four new fitness studios, which will be used for Zumba and spin classes, as well as a multi-purpose family swimming pool and lap pool. Before, the YMCA only had one fitness studio and two pools which were mostly used for competitive swimming.

A notable addition to the YMCA will be a Lawrence General Hospital rehabilitation center on the lower level of the building. The center, staffed by trained medical professionals, will give YMCA members the opportunity to see their doctors or receive treatment for injuries right on site.

"The partnership between (the YMCA) and Lawrence General is a great example of community collaboration," Kapelson said. "I always say, 'You work better as a group than as an individual,' and this is a great example of that."

Donations have helped fund the project; to date, the organization has received nearly \$8 million from local residents and businesses through fundraising efforts and personal donations.

Harvey Construction of Bedford, N.H., has been constructing the building, while Sasaki Associates of Watertown designed the structure. While the building process has been lengthy, Turek and Kapelson said the patience and support of the YMCA members has been "truly great," and the end result will be worth the wait.

"All of these improvements and additions are going to increase the amount of impact we have on this facility," Turek said. "We're really proud of the work we've been able to do while remaining open for our members. This new facility will continue serve the people here for years to come."

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