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Chicken Coops to Give Way to Animal Refuge

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ASHFORD

WORK is expected to begin this month on demolishing three enormous chicken coops and a former egg-processing plant here to make way for a domestic animal sanctuary.

By midsummer, the 43-acre site should be cleared of the buildings that a decade ago operated as an egg farm, said Susan Linker, chief executive officer of Our Companions, an animal welfare group based in Bloomfield that plans to build and operate the sanctuary to care for and find permanent homes for domestic animals that would otherwise be euthanized.

Two 36,000-square-foot coops at the site are the largest buildings in town, First Selectman Ralph Fletcher said. The third coop is 18,000 square feet.

To begin work on the sanctuary, the animal welfare group raised about $300,000 and broke ground on the project last year, Ms. Linker said. An anonymous donor is providing much of the demolition services and moved his equipment to the site last week, she said.

Kaestle Boos Architects

A second round of fund-raising, which aims to raise $600,000 in a year, began this month and will go toward building a 1,300-square-foot cottage to provide temporary housing for rescued dogs and cats awaiting adoption, Ms. Linker said. Construction is expected to begin in the middle of 2008.

"We are doing things in phases," Ms. Linker said about the $12 million sanctuary, expected to take about 10 years to complete.

Plans call for building 12 to 16 homelike cottages for dogs and cats, as well as a public dog park, walking trails, a pet memorial garden, isolation kennels for animals that need medical treatment and an adoption center and education building where animal care and training classes will be conducted.

After Our Companions received the land from another animal-rescue group, Helping Paws, of Colchester, in December 2002, it planned a $15 million sanctuary, Ms. Linker said. The group scaled back its plans after a 2006 survey found more wetlands than anticipated at the site.

"We had to redo our master plan," Ms. Linker said. "We realized the site we could build on was smaller. We clustered the housing and are maximizing the space. We will have one building less. It's still a significant project."

Ms. Linker said the institutional appearance of many animal shelters can be depressing, which is why the proposed sanctuary is designed to provide a hopeful atmosphere. "It's important that the buildings look and feel like homes," Ms. Linker said.