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Door County Business Converts Old Building Into Staff Housing

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With affordable housing in short supply across Door County, one local business is stepping in with a hands-on solution. The owners of a popular waterfront restaurant are converting a former assisted living facility into permanent housing for employees, aiming to ease the housing crunch and support the local workforce.

Brothers Matt and Michael Hanson, who run Waterfront Mary’s in Sturgeon Bay, are behind the initiative. They recently received city approval to repurpose “The Gathering,” a now-

closed assisted living building, into living quarters for up to 14 workers. For the Hansons, this project is both a practical fix and a long-term investment in their team.

“We wanted to have employee housing because we’ve had so many other people who haven’t had it,” Matt Hanson shared with *NBC 26 WGBA-TV*. After years of struggling to find staff due to a lack of nearby housing, the brothers decided to act. “That was one of the reasons we realized we need to provide housing for our staff, ’cause one, they can’t work here and afford housing, so why not just give it to them? It helps them out and it helps us out.”

Community Impact

While the new housing will serve Waterfront Mary’s employees, it is expected to benefit the broader Sturgeon Bay area. Many workers come to the region for jobs but find themselves priced out of local rentals, forcing long commutes or missed job opportunities.

“I mean, they work all over the community, so while they are initially coming to work for us, they actually end up stimulating the whole community,” Matt explained.

The plan has earned praise from city officials working to support housing efforts amid a growing labor shortage. Stephanie Servia, with Sturgeon Bay Community Development, said the city is hopeful that more businesses will explore similar strategies to accommodate their workers. “Just having employers be a little bit more, find unique circumstances to fit their needs,” she said.

Servia added that the city is pushing to expand housing access across Sturgeon Bay. “As a city, we’re hoping that we can get more housing options out there for people, so that’ll hopefully help overall,” she noted.

The housing project reflects a broader trend in tourist-heavy communities, where small business owners are forced to think outside the box to keep operations running. In many cases, providing housing is no longer a perk but a necessity.

The Hanson brothers are optimistic that this housing will be up and running soon, though no official date has been set. As they prepare to open the doors, the hope is that offering affordable staff housing will help their business and contribute to the stability of the local economy.