SHELTER CONSTRUCTION BEGINS — Truesdale city officials and project planners gathered Oct. 13 in Bruer Park to commemorate the groundbreaking for a community center and storm shelter. Pictured, from left, are project manager Tim Churchill, public works supervisor Mark Bennett, Aldermen Robert Green and Jerry Cannon, Mayor Chris Watson, Alderman Mike Thomas and past Alderman Stanley Brookshier, architect Kevin Gerloff, and engineer Bart Korman. Adam Rollins photo.

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could be done sooner if the foundation is set this year.

Members of the city government and project planning team gathered at Bruer Park Oct. 13 for a ceremonial groundbreaking to mark the start of the project. Once complete, the community center will offer shelter from severe weather such as tornadoes, and also will have features for indoor sports or community gatherings.

"It's also going to have a mezzanine upstairs, an office, different stuff like that. It's not just going to be a typical, square gymnasium," said Truesdale Mayor Chris Watson, adding that a kitchen installation is planned as a future piece of the project. "Right now, we're just trying to get the basic building going with our budget, and then add on some things."

Funding remains a lingering issue for the construction. The community center and shelter is being paid for by a cost-share grant between Truesdale and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA's portion of the project is $1.6 million, while Truesdale must pay at least $186,000.

However, because of "non-essential" elements FEMA won't pay for, including air conditioning —Truesdale is estimating it will pay more than $329,000 by the time the building is done.

To cover the gap between what the city budgeted and the actual project cost, Truesdale is seeking additional state grant funding for the community center. Thus far, there hasn't been much luck.

City Administrator MaryLou Rainwater said the timing of the project is wrong for Missouri's Community Development Block Grant program, the most likely source of state aid. But she remains hopeful of a different source of public funding can be found.

"We're not giving up yet," Rainwater commented.

If grant funding doesn't come together, Watson said the city has received options for a short-term loan, which would cover the additional $144,000 in project expenses that Truesdale needs to account for. The mayor said that option would be used only as a last resort.