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History buffs promoting Rochester grain elevator

BY GINA DAMRON • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • JUNE 1, 2009

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An old grain elevator in Rochester could get recognition as an official historic site.

Rod Wilson, president of the Rochester-Avon Historical Society, said the group is planning to apply this summer to have the Rochester Elevator placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Parts of the old building -- located at East University Drive and Water Street -- date to 1880 and even before the Civil War.

The building housing the elevator is to be spruced up Saturday with the help of society members, volunteers and a team of professional painters, who plan to slap a fresh coat of red paint on the building. Wilson said the society hopes to get the elevator running by spring to show folks how it transported grain from the building's basement to the second floor.

The building is used as a retail shop, where locals can buy dog and cat food, grass seed and swimming pool supplies. It hasn't had a face-lift since the late 1960s, said Lawrence Smith, who has owned the building since 1956.

Wilson said members of the society and community had hoped to turn the site into a community space but, because of the economy, Mayor Jeffrey Cuthbertson said the city likely won't purchase the property. "I don't see that as something we can afford to do at this point," he said.

But Councilman David Becker said the building needs to be rehabbed and turned into a gathering spot for the community. "I think this is critical to good economic development," Becker said.

A deal to sell the property and move the building to a location between the Clinton River and Clinton River Trail fell through a few years ago.

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PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

The Rochester-Avon Historical Society plans to apply this summer to have the Rochester Elevator, left, placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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