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Historians rally to rescue Rochester 'icon'

BY ANNETTE KINGSBURY • ECCENTRIC STAFF WRITER • OCTOBER 16, 2008

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Two years after plans to move the Rochester Elevator fell through, the Rochester-Avon Historical Society announced a new plan Monday night.

ADVERTISEMENT Society President Rod Wilson said the group will repaint the 1880's landmark at Water Street and East University in downtown Rochester. The work, to be carried out next spring, will include "some type of coating on the overhang," Wilson told Rochester City Council.

The announcement came during a blight hearing for the Elevator. Owner Lawrence Smith requested the hearing after the city gave him 30 days to complete repairs and clean-up on the site, which also includes several smaller buildings.

Smith said Monday that he was shocked when a previous deal to convert his land to condominiums and move the distinctive structure to city-owned land fell through.

"I had made all kinds of plans to move," he said, noting that he had rented other space and had auctioned off inventory at a substantial loss. "I have not financially recovered from the things that happened two years ago. The 30 days that was allowed me put me in a terrible pinch."

In addition, Smith said he wanted repairs on the elevator to be historically accurate in the hopes the building will be reused.

"It would be my wish and probably a lot of people in town that if the dirt were purchased, that the building would either be incorporated with some project of the purchaser or moved," he said. "If we can agree on something that is historically relevant and prudent ... there's a few things that I would like to do also."

Council was sympathetic but said some obvious blight has to be cleaned up. Council has now given Smith 60 more days to accomplish specific tasks, and until April for repairs to the elevator itself.

Wilson said once the fix-up is completed, the Historical Society wants to get the elevator's conveyor belt system working again and apply for historic designation. He said the group has about \$15,000 from its previous Save the Elevator campaign but will need to raise substantially more money.

"We would really like to see the elevator stay where it is located and be adaptively reused," he said.

"We think that particular building ... is an icon in the community. And we think we can make it even more so."

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The Rochester Elevator, a city landmark, is in line to be spruced up by the Rochester-Avon Historical Society. (John Stormzand | Staff Photographer)

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