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Article published Jan 11, 2007

Elevator Square plan still on Rochester's table

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A year ago, it seemed like all systems were go for the sale of the Rochester Elevator property and the move of the historic old shed to a city-owned site a short distance away. The elevator was to be donated so it could be moved to make way for condominiums.

But after significant efforts by the Rochester-Avon Historical Society (which had even lined up a television production company to film the move) things came to a screeching halt in July when the sale of the Water Street property fell through. No condos, no donation, no move.

Since then, a new plan in which the city would purchase the property and use it for a town square, preserving the elevator on its historic site, has been floated. Rochester City Council has held several closed-door sessions to discuss the matter, but no formal vote has been taken. The meetings have been closed because they involve land acquisition.

"I don't know any of the content of the closed-door sessions," said Greg Doyle, president of the historical society. "Pretty soon they're going to have to have some conclusion, one way or the other. ..."

"We've only got three ways to go here: The city buys it, someone else buys it, or it just continues doing business" as it is now.

Doyle said he's confident that if another buyer for the property comes along, the building would still be donated, rather than demolished. The society has lined up donors willing to move the building and had received the necessary city approvals for the move.

TOWN SQUARE OPTION

A Downtown Development Authority study aimed at revitalizing the east side of downtown Rochester called for a town square one block west of the elevator's present site. When the elevator sale fell through, Councilman David Becker saw opportunity and suggested the town square could be reconfigured to include the elevator on its present site.

That concept "is very appealing to us," Doyle said. "To leave any historic structure in its (original) spot is ideal. Because it's not only the building, but it tells the story. You can stand at the train depot there and see how that lines up with the building."

Becker said since no action has been taken on the original town square proposal, and since the elevator is still for sale, anything can happen.

"I think there's still a reasonable chance," he said. "It depends on the extent to which city council accepts the East Area Design Study and the concept of a town square in it. ..."

"We haven't turned down the idea ... and for a program of that newness, that's remarkable."

Some property owners who would have been displaced by the original town square (which was proposed for the block bounded by E. University, Water, Fourth and East streets) had opposed the original concept. But the new one sounds better to them.

Leo Silber, who co-owns a jewelry store on East Street with his brother, Harold, objected to being displaced. Becker's plan "would probably bring people down" to the business district, Silber said. "We go along. It's up to the city fathers to analyze the cost."

Silber said a town square would be an improvement over the elevator's current state of affairs, which includes a lot of truck traffic. And though he's not sure the area will be a draw for pedestrians, he's worried about new competition coming from two shopping centers under construction at Rochester Road and Tienken, just a mile away. "That's our concern; what's it going to do to downtown Rochester," Silber said.

