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Historic group has big plans

BY ANNETTE KINGSBURY • ECCENTRIC STAFF WRITER • APRIL 26, 2009

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A feasibility study to determine whether the Rochester Elevator could be turned into the centerpiece of a new park in downtown Rochester is just one project on the wish list of the Rochester Historical Commission.

Commission President Mike Lopez presented an ambitious list of projects to City Council April 13 for potential funding in the 2009-10 fiscal year, which begins July 1. The commission would like to apply for designation on the National Register of Historic Places for downtown Rochester, begin work on a self-guided "museum in the streets," and preserve or replace older headstones in Mt. Avon Cemetery. The estimated tab for all the requested work is \$50,000.

The campaign to move the Rochester Elevator has been on hold since a deal to sell its spot on Water Street fell through. The idea of preserving the elevator on site has picked up steam since a consultant suggested the city needs a gathering place downtown.

"People recognize the elevator as an integral part of our downtown, our history," Lopez said. "There are advantages of having a public gathering space in our downtown surrounding a historic structure like the elevator."

The commission requested \$11,200 for a Phase One study, including due diligence analysis and conceptual development.

"We think this is a treasure we don't want to lose for our city and it's our top concern," Lopez said.

Mayor Jeff Cuthbertson said the proposed budget, which will be the subject of a public hearing Monday, earmarks \$50,000 for historical capital projects. Cuthbertson said he supports "augmenting what we do as a community" for historic preservation. Councilman David Becker, council's liaison to the historical commission, said he is "wholly supportive of the recommendations we have here. The commission has done a lot of work ... to come up with something that will enhance the historical character of the city."

NOTHING APPROVED YET

Still, no promises were made, and Cuthbertson said capital projects may be one area council will decide to cut back due to the continuing tough economy.

"We have not committed to any of those projects," he said. "We're going to talk about them before we approve anything."

In addition to the elevator study, the commission requested \$10,000 to hire a consultant to prepare and file the National Register application.

"It's long overdue and we think Rochester deserves this," Lopez said.

An additional \$13,800 was requested to begin development of a self-guided walking tour that would display historical information in the ground or on buildings. The work would be timed to coincide with the reconstruction of Main Street in 2012.

As for the cemetery, Lopez said many of the older headstones cannot be restored and must be replaced. He requested \$15,000.

"Time and the years have not been kind," he said. "We think it would be valuable to preserve what we can."

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The Rochester Historical Commission Tombstone is requesting money to preserve or replace old headstones in Mt. Avon Cemetery. (John Stormzand | Staff Photographer)

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