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Sunrise withdraws bid to purchase elevator property

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Hold the elevator, indeed.

After well over a year of speculation, fund-raising and preparation to save the Rochester Elevator Barn from demolition, the Rochester-Avon Historical Society's trademark rallying cry has come true, but not in the way they expected.

Sunrise Senior Living recently rescinded its bid to purchase property on the corner of Water Street and University Drive, where the Elevator Barn currently sits. According to Laura Hester, vice president of development for Sunrise, the move was a "market decision" based on the area's economic conditions.

"The timing was not good to bring forward a condominium project," said Hester.

Sunrise had originally proposed to construct a 100-unit senior independent living condominium development at that location. It would have featured a concierge desk, a fitness facility, a main living room, a restaurant and bar, a café, a game room, a dining room, a private party dining room, a full kitchen and a patio courtyard. Developers had also proposed that the building contain an undetermined amount of first floor retail space.

The withdrawal will not affect the Sunrise retirement development on University Drive next to the Royal Park Hotel, and Sunrise will continue to pursue new condominium developments around Oakland County in the coming years, said Hester.

"Sunrise still seeks to bring independent living into the marketplace," said Hester. "I think the question is just going to be the project time."

As part of the property purchase deal, Sunrise had agreed to donate the Rochester Elevator Barn to the Rochester-Avon Historical Society, as long as the society could raise the funds to move it off of the property. The RAHS was prepared to move the barn to a new location south of the downtown area on the Clinton River Trail. Now that the sale has fallen through, the fate of the Rochester Elevator Barn has been put on hold until another bidder can be found.

The Rochester-Avon Historical Society, meanwhile, has pledged to continue supporting their ongoing "Hold the Elevator!" campaign to ensure that no matter what happens, the structure is preserved.

"I'm very comfortable that the grain elevator is secure," said Greg Doyle, president of the RAHS.

Doyle stated that the society would support any efforts to keep the elevator at its current location, but would also be happy to work with a new bidder and move it down to the Clinton River.

Sunrise's move to withdraw its bid provided a bit of a twist to a situation that, in the past few months, has been rife with delays.

After receiving mixed opinions on a preliminary site plan from Rochester Planning Commission members at a May 1 meeting, Sunrise twice delayed a follow-up presentation to Rochester City Council. At a June 12 City Council meeting, Johnson announced that Sunrise needed an additional four to eight weeks to prepare for the presentation, but did not set a date.

Also in May, the Historical Society announced that it would need to tack an additional few months of preparation onto the barn's then-finalized June 17 move date, meaning that it wouldn't have been moved to its proposed new location until fall at the earliest.

Now that the Sunrise deal has fallen through, the elevator's future is in a holding pattern until a new buyer can be found, said Doyle.

"Our main emphasis all along has been the preservation of the building," said Doyle. "Regardless of whether that elevator is moved to a new location, I think we've accomplished that."

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