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Elevator debate heats up in wake of Sunrise departure

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What should happen to the elevator property?

That question has been on the tips of tongues throughout Rochester now that Sunrise Senior Living has withdrawn its bid to purchase the block of downtown land on the corner of University Drive and Water Street, where the Rochester Elevator Barn stands.

The answer may be a long way from settled, but the debate is just heating up.

Several Rochester officials and business people were disappointed when Sunrise announced it no longer intends to build a 100-unit senior independent living condominium complex at the elevator site.

“I thought that was a very worthy project,” said Ken Bilodeau, chair of the Rochester Planning Commission. “I wasn’t happy to see it go away, but hopefully, something else will come back in its place.”

Sunrise’s departure caused Frank Rewold and Son Inc. to delay plans to construct a parking deck in the 400 block of Water Street until they can determine what sort of project takes Sunrise’s place.

“Obviously, we’re disappointed Sunrise didn’t go through because that would have been a perfect fit with everything that’s around it,” said Roy Rewold, CEO of Frank Rewold and Son Inc.

Lawrence Smith of Rochester Elevator currently owns the building and the property beneath it. No suitors have been officially named.

David Becker, Rochester mayor pro tem, deemed Sunrise bowing out as a “very positive” turn of events for the aesthetic and economic future of downtown Rochester.

“We’re highly successful, and I think that success is built on the charm and the quaintness and the human scale of the architecture downtown, among other things,” said Becker. “I saw the four- or five-story ... building Sunrise was proposing as being completely counter to what’s been successful in the town.”

Instead of putting a building on that property, Becker has suggested that the city purchase the elevator property and incorporate the existing barn into a proposed town square park — the plans for which are laid out in the details of the East Area Design Project. As it stands now, the EADP suggests that a town square be constructed on the block surrounded by University, East, Fourth and Water streets, where six retail stores and two homes currently sit.

Becker stated that he is “strongly against” displacing people from their homes or businesses.

Rochester City Council member Jeff Cuthbertson agreed with Becker that the city should take a look at purchasing and reusing the elevator property.

“I think that the city taking a look at that property certainly bears merit,” said Cuthbertson. “If we’re talking about a town square, I think that there may be one or two more locations other than what’s been proposed to date that might be worth considering.”

Greg Doyle, president of the Rochester-Avon Historical Society, would most like to see the elevator remain at

its current location, possibly integrated into a town square in some fashion. If the property is sold to a developer, however, Doyle and the RAHS has no problem following through with its original plans to move the historic barn south to the Clinton River.

“We’ve assured that it does have a future, one way or another,” said Doyle.

Rewold, however, stated that if the city purchased the elevator property and turned it into a park, they probably wouldn’t build a parking deck on Water Street at all.

“That’s not the right place for that elevator,” said Rewold. “It’s too valuable a piece of property to have something like that there.”

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