



(Mark Busch - mbusch@shawmedia.com)

Caption [-](#)

The property at 942 Maple Ave. in Downers Grove, known as the Edwards Home, is a 1890s Queen Anne style Victorian home and is listed in the village's historical property survey as architecturally significant.

Fate of Downers Grove's Edwards home hangs in the balance

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DOWNERS GROVE – Tom Nybo was curious when he saw the "for sale" sign appear in front of the Victorian-era mansion at 942 Maple Ave., so he went online to view the listing.

To his dismay, the Downers Grove resident found the ornate home and the adjacent house are being marketed together as a "prime development parcel."

The online posting features an aerial photo, notes the lots' nearness to the downtown business corridor, and gives no indication of the valuable structure.

The Queen Anne Victorian, known as the Edwards House, with its conical roofs, ornate red molding and other distinct characteristics, was built in the late 1880s by W.H. Edwards, a prominent early Downers Grove businessman. He founded the first bank in the village in 1892, according to Downers Grove Museum volunteer Carol Wandschneider, and the house was also the first in town to have running water.

Though the house was last used as an office space, a peak through the windows shows its hardwood floors, wood molding and built-ins are still intact. The Village of Downers Grove also listed the home as one of 15 "historically significant" structures on Maple Avenue and Main Street in its historical structure survey last year.

Now, Nybo and the Downers Grove Historical Society are worried the Edwards home and the less-notable house next door could be left vulnerable to the wrecking ball, depending on the type of development that comes to the block, and have started a grass roots efforts to draw awareness to the building.

"I think all of us can agree that we didn't want to see Maple Avenue change face," Nybo said. "Everything else is being torn down, let's keep something that we can reflect back on. It's inevitable that were going to have tear downs. That's how progress works. But we need to have one street that we can look at and say 'That's still pretty much 90 percent intact.'"

Unfortunately for Nybo and the historical society, the village's historic property survey does not in itself offer protection for buildings, according to Downers Grove Spokesman Doug Kozlowski.

"The historical significance suggested by the survey can be used as a starting point for property owners voluntarily seeking a landmark designation," he said in an email. "Only those properties with a Historic District designation or Landmark Designation granted by council are subject to review and approval

when changes are sought."

No construction or demolition permits have yet been filed for either lot, Kozlowski said.

Third parties can also seek landmark designation with the property owner's consent, according to Downers Grove Mayor Martin Tully. He said the village's current historic preservation ordinance, approved in 2007, seeks to strike a balance between individual property rights and preservation. The ordinance, and property survey also allowed the village to earn certification by the National Parks Foundation. That certification allows owners of historical properties to apply for funds for restoration or maintenance.

Tully said there has yet to be a situation where the ordinance's balance between property rights and preservation was tested.

The Edwards House, depending on which direction the sales leads, could provide that test.

Coldwell Banker realtor Jan Morel said there is a contract for sale on the property, but no closing date has been set. He would not give the name of the potential buyer and said he was not sure what was planned for the two lots.

According to the county recorder's office, the current owner is Citizens Financial Bank, which was bought by First Merchants Corp. last year. Calls placed to First Merchants Corp. were not returned.

"The Historical Society's position on this is that we deeply regret that the village is not taking a more protective standpoint on what we think is a historically significant building in the village," Historical Society member Jim Dohren said. "Even in its own historic survey, it's labeled as a significant building, and yet they seem to be ignoring that."

Tully said short of amending the preservation ordinance to remove the owner consent clause when applying for landmark status, he's not sure what else the historical society would want the village to do. In the end, Tully said community interest might be the strongest force.

"I think the last few times where a historically significant structure has been threatened, we've seen the community speak up," he said.

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