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Residents push to protect Downers Grove Victorian house

July 11, 2014 | By Dawn Rhodes, Tribune reporter

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A 19th-century [home](#) in downtown Downers Grove is being sold, sparking fears for some residents that it could be torn down to make room for a commercial development.

The lots at 942 and 936 Maple Ave. are on the market for \$1.25 million, according to an online listing from Coldwell Banker. The 1.1 acres sit on one of the oldest streets in town and among other historic [buildings](#), including the First Baptist Church and the Lincoln Center.



This Victorian-style, 19th-century home at 942 Maple Avenue is b...

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Listing agent Jan Morel said Thursday the property is under contract and an offer has been accepted. He declined to reveal the identity of the buyer or the sale price, but said the sale should close within the next couple of months.

"They're being marketed as land that anyone can anything with," Morel said.

The Victorian-style, three-story home at 942 Maple dates back to the 1890s and was first occupied by W.H. Edwards, a bank cashier and village trustee, according to the Downers Grove Historical Society. With cracking bluish-gray paint and dark red trim, the [house](#) sits far back from the street and is shaded and surrounded by several large trees.

Towers and turrets adorn the asphalt shingle roof. It also has stained glass and an wide, full-front porch. An article from the Downers Grove Reporter in the 1990s stated that the home was the first in town to have running water and that Edwards lived in the home for

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more than four decades.

The impending sale has spurred response from local residents who want to protect the structures from the wrecking ball.

Tom Nybo said he admires historic [architecture](#) and grew up riding his bike past the massive home at 942 Maple. Nybo, 36, recently started a Facebook page to draw attention to the issue. More than 300 people have "liked" the page.

"Maple Avenue is one the last streets in Downers Grove that's still intact," Nybo said. "We need to keep the integrity of certain aspects of this town. My parents moved here because of the architecture. Once they're gone they're gone. You can't replace them. You can't rebuild this type of architecture."

Molly Donofrio said she also lamented the possibility of seeing such an old structure cleared out.

"I do think it's sad," Donofrio said on a recent afternoon as she took a walk with her 18-month old daughter. "That's part of the charm of Downers Grove, the historic appeal. I think that when there's character and things like this, it's different from a shiny new shopping mall. We have a business part of town. Where does it stop?"

The village implemented a historic preservation ordinance in 2007, which allows anyone to apply to put a home or district up for landmark status consideration. The Architectural Design Review Board evaluates petitions and makes a recommendation to the village council for final approval.

An architectural survey completed in November 2013 identifies 942 Maple as a "significant" property in the Main Street/Maple Avenue corridor. That label means that a structure is at least 50 years old and fits at least one requirement for the National Register of Historic Places. The survey listed it as significant because it is a "highly distinguished Queen Anne house with ornamentation."

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Neither designation, however, automatically grants any special protections to the property. Any effort to secure landmark status requires consent of the property owner. County records show that both homes are owned by Citizens [Financial](#) Bank.

"We regret that we could potentially lose this home. We're all for preservation of any historical structure in Downers Grove," said Tom Casey, president of the Historical Society. "We support preservation but we also understand property rights. The Historical Society has no authority to say what should be done with the property."

In the meantime, the group continues to spread the word about the latest developments.

"We're there to educate the community on the historical aspects of the town," Casey said. "But we agree that it needs to be a push from the citizens. As soon as (the owners) go into the village with a plan saying this is what we want to do, that's when the stuff will hit the fan."

"I just want to see how much interest we can gain and catch the eye of the village," Nybo said.

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