

Edwards House future in jeopardy after advocate for home balks at village proposal

Published: Thursday, March 5, 2015 4:04 p.m. CST

[DOWNERS GROVE](#) – A three-way deal that would help save the historic Edwards House has hit a snag after being approved by the village council Tuesday night.

John Tillotson, a Downers Grove resident who stepped forward to help try to save the house, said he will not agree to the deal the council approved.

The village has been working on a three-way agreement with Tillotson and FFM-DG Development LLC, which is planning to build a condominium complex on the site of the house.

To avoid the house having to be torn down, Tillotson offered to move it from its current location at 942 Maple Ave. to a property he owns at 743 Maple Ave.

He wanted the village to cover the costs required to move the house to its new location, which are expected to total \$133,000.

According to documents Tillotson provided to the council, moving the house with financial assistance from the village would result in a \$168,000 loss due to work he would need to do to prepare the site.

"We'll put a substantial amount of money in, but we need a little bit of help," he said.

However, at Tuesday's meeting, the council unanimously approved a deal that would provide a \$123,560 loan to Tillotson to cover the move. The loan would not accrue interest, and would be required to be paid back over a 10-year period.

But Tillotson said he's not interested in the agreement based on how much the renovation of the site and home is estimated to cost.

"In this case, the problem is we're already in the red a fair amount," he said.

Mayor Martin Tully said he was disappointed the two sides couldn't reach an agreement, but said the village is not going to give up on saving the house and that he believes progress is being made.

"It looks like the gap's growing smaller," he said.

Tully said the developers hope to move forward with the project by May, but the village may not have two months to seal the deal.

"It takes time to prepare a site and it takes time to prepare a move," he said.

Tillotson agreed he will also continue to work on saving the house.

"We understand that it's not an easy answer. It's more complex than that," he said. "We really want this to happen."

Mike Behm of the Friends of the Edwards House group presented the council with another solution. He proposed using private funds – which have not yet been raised – to move the Edwards House to an open spot at 5540 Main St.

After the move, the village would buy the property and sell it to a private developer, who would renovate the home.

Commissioner Sean Durkin said he had concerns over the risk of the house not selling. Commissioner Becky Rheintgen shared a similar worry.

"I think it's a wonderful idea. I think the hesitation is the village owning property," she said.

Ken Lerner, chairman of the Pierce Downers Heritage Alliance, said the organization has collected \$5,000 in donations to save the house.

But not everyone was in favor of moving the home. Scott Lazar, who lives in the 800 block of Maple Avenue, said he doesn't see a compelling public benefit.

"It is in no way a must-have for the village, and we're acting like it is," he said.

Lazar said it feels wrong to be giving public money to a private project, and this could potentially open the door for any resident who wants to perform renovations to an old home.

Two amendments were offered during the discussion. Commissioner David Olsen tried to amend the motion to allow the village to repay Tillotson using building permit fees from the developers. That motion did not receive any support.

Rheintgen offered an amendment that would allow Tillotson to apply to have his land split into two plots, allowing him to place his two houses next to each other. This would provide an economic incentive to Tillotson because it would increase the value of his property, but he said he's concerned about the size of the plots.

"So while it does solve some of the economic issues, I don't want to live there," he said.

Rheintgen's motion failed 4-3.

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