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Supporters start fundraising website to save house

Couple hopes to move home to site they own, live in it

By **Annemarie Mannion** Tribune reporter

Supporters who want to save the historic Edwards house in Downers Grove have started a campaign to raise as much as \$123,000 to help pay for moving it.

They want to move the house from its current Maple Street address to one on the same street a few blocks away.

“It would only be used for moving costs — to get it from point A to point B,” said Tom Nybo, one of the organizers of the website saveedwardshouse.com

Resident John Tillotson and his wife, Lauri Wast, are seeking approval to move the house from 942 Maple Ave. to property they own at 743 Maple Ave. They want to restore the Queen Anne-style house that was built in the late 1800s and get local landmark status to protect it.

Tillotson, who lives on Benton Street, approached the village in January about moving the house that might otherwise be torn down to make way for condos. The effort to save the house stems from a controversial decision in December by the village to allow a 55-unit condo building to replace the 19th-century house.

A map created in January showed that more than 20 trees would need to be permanently removed, removed and replanted or trimmed to allow for the home’s relocation.

Tillotson said recently that he thought he could minimize the loss of trees. He worked with his own tree and relocation experts and with village staff to come up with a new plan for moving the house.

The new plan calls for five parkway trees to be removed and replanted, three trees on private properties to be pruned, four parkway trees to be removed and replaced with new trees and one tree to be removed and replaced on the Tillotson property.

“The prevailing opinion is that the impacts (on trees) are substantially smaller,” he said.

Tillotson said he wants to preserve the house while not disturbing neighbors. Originally, architect Mike Behm had proposed moving the house to a property he owns in the village. Tillotson took over the plan when he realized the property he owns is closer and would be an easier move.

“Our intent is to live in the home,” Tillotson said. “We don’t want to be responsible for upsetting the neighborhood and having this impact on the trees.”

He said the effort to move the house would entail an agreement between him, the village and the condo developer. He also is asking the village to set aside \$140,000 in permit fees that will be paid by the developer to the village to be used for relocation costs.

Nybo said the fundraising campaign was started to help pay the moving costs because he fears the council will not support the idea of setting aside permit fees for moving costs.

About \$3,000 has been raised since the website went live Sunday, he said.

Tillotson said financial input from the village or other sources is needed to make the plan work.

“It’s not possible for an individual to take this on. It doesn’t make financial sense,” he said.

The Village Council will consider the proposal at its March 3 meeting.

If it approves the plans, Tillotson said they plan to move the house by the middle or end of April.

If the council doesn’t approve the plans, he said there are no other proposals for saving it.

“There is no other offer on the table as an alternative,” he said. “The very likely option is that it will be demolished.”

He said he hopes it doesn’t come to that.

“I think it would be tragic to tear it down,” Tillotson said. “It’s one of the most significant houses in all of Downers Grove. It’s almost like a piece of art to us.” amannion@tribpub.com



DAWN RHODES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A new plan to save the Edwards home at 942 Maple Ave., Downers Grove, would move it a few blocks away. A new website is being used to raise money for moving costs. The village and developer must sign off on the plans.