

Sale of former bank paves way for renovation

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port Historical Society poised to acquire building and convert it to museum

The Port Washington Historical Society was expected to buy the historic Business Man's Club building in downtown Port Wednesday, Society President Jackie Oleson said.

"It's a big day for us," she said Tuesday afternoon. "It's pretty awesome."

Two weeks ago, plans to renovate the facade of the building at 118 N. Franklin St. were approved by the city's Plan Commission.

Members were enthusiastic about the project and its anticipated effect on the downtown.

"I think this is awesome," commission member Ron Voigt said May 17. "Having someone who wants to invest in this kind of work is awesome."

An anonymous donor is providing the funds for the Port Washington Historical Society to buy and refurbish the structure, recreating its original facade.

"The schematic is impressive," Mayor Tom Mlada, chairman of the commission, said as the panel reviewed a rendering of the building. "It goes a long way in caring for the rich history of our city."

Architect Mike Ehrlich told the commission much of the facade was destroyed when the building was incorporated into the neighboring bank building decades ago. Any stonework that jutted out was cut off when metal panels resembling the white facade of the bank were installed, he said.

The society, Ehrlich said, is intent on restoring that work.

"So much has been destroyed," he said. "The details are extremely intricate in the stonework. We're looking to remake all of it."

However, he said, the goal is not to make the building look newly renovated.

"The idea is not to make it look brand new but to look aged," Ehrlich said.

Construction is expected to begin in late summer or early fall and take nine to 12 months to complete, he said.

The improvements to the building and those being made at the neighboring Schooner Pub will complement changes the city is contemplating making to the alley between the structures, Ehrlich said.

"One thing that will be kind of integral is the alley improvements and making it more of a

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pedestrian walkway," he said.

When completed, the building will have 3,500 square feet devoted to interpretive exhibits as well as an area devoted to educational programs.

The Historical Society also plans to purchase the building at 205 N. Franklin St. immediately south of the former Lueptow's Furniture store.

The society is about \$45,000 away from its \$350,000 goal to purchase and renovate that building, Oleson said. That purchase is expected to be completed Aug. 31, with interior renovations completed this fall and occupancy by the end of the year.

"Hopefully, we can raise the funds earlier than this fall and get started on that ahead of schedule," she said.

That building will house the Society's offices, archives and resource center. There will also be a small display area in the building.