

Oberlin museum gets 2-for-1-deal from feds

Underground Railroad Center needs \$58K more for deal replacing bricks and roof

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The Chronicle-Telegram

OBERLIN - Those behind the effort to renovate Oberlin's historic Gasholder Building into a museum about the Underground Railroad face a wonderful dilemma.

If they are able to raise about \$58,000 more in matching funds in the next six to eight weeks, the federal government is willing to help them rehabilitate the brick facade of the building as well as replace the slate roof.

Assistant City Manager Darlene Colaso said shifting philosophies in how the federal government views transportation enhancement dollars led to more money being allocated to the Gasholder Building, which will be the future home of the Oberlin Underground Railroad Center and a Park-N-Ride facility.

The original intent for the federal grant money was to complete the 1889 Gasholder Building rehabilitation project in phases contingent upon the availability of a 20 percent local share.

The first phase was to replace the building's deteriorated conical slate roof, which a second phase was to restore the brick work on the exterior.

However, the Federal Highway Administration unexpectedly directed that the two phases be combined, she said.

Colaso said the fundraising subteam of the Oberlin Underground Railroad Center's Implementation Team has raised about \$70,000.

The estimated cost for the stabilization and structural rehabilitation is \$641,233, so the required match is \$128,247.

The group needs \$58,247 more to proceed with the project. Bidding will get under way soon, and it is anticipated that City Council will be able to award the construction contract in late September if the funds are raised.

The group is making a plea for support, said Colaso, project coordinator for the center.

"We're hoping to pull some rabbits out of our hats," she said.

The group has contracted Oberlin College and other local benefactors, she said.

If the needed funds are not raised, Colaso said, the museum supporters risk losing the \$917,600 in federal transportation enhancement funding and a \$200,000 congressional earmark for architectural design and planning because both are contingent upon completion of this project.

Colaso called the positive economic development impacts of the project "limitless" and said the greater community really needs to see some of the wonderful items that tell the story of how Oberlin assisted slaves.

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