

# Turner-Dodge interested in LCC house

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Turner House, mansion would be 'wonderful match,' LCC official says

By Daniel Sturm

The Turner Dodge House is interested in acquiring Lansing Community College's old Turner House and turning it into a local-history museum.

"We have been seriously discussing an educational center, and we have quite a bit of land," Gloria Van Dusen, a member of the board of the city-owned historic mansion in Lansing's Old Town. She believes the city needs an educational facility that gives a walk-through experience of history. She said the Turner-Dodge House board discussed the idea at a June 17 meeting. The city is at least aware of the idea. Murdoch Jemerson, the city parks and recreation director, is a board member.

Two unwanted university properties, both located on LCC's downtown Lansing campus, are blocking the college's development proposals. Both Turner House, a 75-year-old, termite-infested building, and North House, another old home, stand in the way of the school's \$45 million master plan to renovate the downtown campus. Early in June, the board of trustees initiated a three-month campaign, called "Help Us Move the House," putting ads into papers to attract potential buyers, who might wish to move the two old properties. Yesterday LCC sent a letter out to 25 non-profit organizations, development companies and housing coalitions in the Mid-Michigan region.

Van Dusen said it made perfect sense to move the Turner House to the museum site in Old Town because the property was built by a cousin of the Turner-Dodge family. "We're working on finding funds, from both the city and from donations, for moving it," said Van Dusen. The Williamston resident said she had a house moved off of Antiques Market of Williamston property when she bought the business, which she has since

sold. "Ours was moved with furniture in it. They only suggested to take the pictures off the wall. It was amazing."

Van Dusen said she hopes LCC will consider donating the building to the museum, because our "cause is justified enough to better the community."

The Turner Dodge House, built in 1858, recently finished final restorations and is open 1 to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday through November.

LCC is entertaining all offers. The dean of LCC's Technical Careers Division, William R. Darr, said: "Our first priority is to find some organization interested in the facilities. And if we're unsuccessful, we'll more than likely move forward with the demolition." The removal would make space for a new health instructional facility, a new administration building, an outdoor amphitheater, and the expansion of Dart Auditorium.

So far there have been "a couple of people" calling, says Ruth Hohl Borger, director of public relations and governmental affairs. Borger said Turner Dodge House and the Turner House would be a "wonderful match." But she also pointed out that prospective buyers are still in the discovery phase. Proposals to move the facilities need to be received by 2 p.m. July 15. There will be an information session at 10 a.m. Tuesday, July 2, where those interested will be allowed to tour inside the historical buildings.

"We have no idea how many people will show up," Darr said. The dean pointed out that the potential future use of the two buildings - preferably public rather than private - as well as the investor's financial resources would be top priorities. LCC would like to find a purchaser with the resources available to relocate and renovate the historic properties. Darr contacted professional house movers in order to research the costs and came up with some "very preliminary" price estimations: the cost of moving a house about two city blocks ranges from \$110,000 to \$270,000.

"It's very difficult and very expensive, and it affects public utilities and road clearances," said Nick Scarpone, senior associate at Hobbs and Black. The firms' architects created the proposal to relocate LCC's administrative functions to a new facility and recommended getting rid of the two historical buildings because of campus space problems.

The city of Ann Arbor has some experience in moving historic houses and creating historical museums. In June 1990 the Kellogg Warden House (1834) was moved from Wall Street to North Main Street, a distance of roughly one mile to become a county historical museum. "It was a lot of trouble," remembers Pauline Walters, president of the Washtenaw County Historical Society. It was lifted up, put on rollers and pulled by a huge dump truck. Moving the Kellogg Warden house from its original place to the new site took about four hours. The police department controlled traffic and employees from the Parks Department cut branches and trees. Meanwhile, the fire department made sure that disconnected telephones and electricity in the area didn't cause any major accidents. "There was very little damage," Walters said. Since 1990 an overall cost of \$350,000 has been invested into the Kellogg Warden House, including the rebuilding of its the original basement, which cost \$87,000.

The Lansing Coalition for Housing Preservation is potentially interested in acquiring and moving the house. "It would be an ideal match. LCC has the historic house, and we have the property," said the organization's spokesman, Robert Reid. Two blocks away from where the old LCC houses stand, at the street corner of Saginaw and Seymour streets, Reid's wife owns an empty lot. They say they're both interested in historical

buildings and preserving the downtown area. Three years ago, the couple's plan to move the historical Credit Union Building on South Capitol fell through, because of neighbors' concerns. Reid said if either one of the LCC homes was in good condition, he'd probably apply to get renovation monies from the city.

However, an expert report on the architectural integrity of both buildings comes to a quite pessimistic conclusion: "The termite infestation in both units is very bad and it will be an ongoing problem wherever these houses go, if moved," stated Kevin R. Webb, a member of the Historical Committee for the City of Lansing in an report to LCC. "It's not the best building to have an office in. It's got both electrical and water damage," adds LCC's Borger. Darr confirms: "The building needs a lot of work."

LCC will contribute to the relocation costs, said Darr. It has budgeted just enough money for demolition, however, which is an estimated \$25,000 to \$30,000 for the Turner House and some \$17,000-\$25,000 to get rid of the North House.

Sophie Turner built the Turner House in 1927. In 1942 it became part of the Turner Estate, as overseen by a Detroit trust company. A group proposed to give the property to the state to use as a museum. Sometime after 1942 Michigan acquired the property, which it turned into a state historical museum. In 1980 the LCC board agreed to take over the property. The Turner House now houses LCC's Performing Arts Program staff, which will be relocated. The North House is used for administrative offices.

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