

## Development in Troy still a guessing game

By AMY HALLORAN

First published: Thursday, February 28, 2008

Time is running out, warns developer Sam Judge. Quick! Someone might snap up a drab piece of overpriced property on Sixth Avenue, and Troy will lose a chance to sign away civic riverfront property. All for a song that hasn't even been written, or, more literally, a building that has not been drawn, let alone backed by a bank.

A City Council committee has been examining Mayor Harry Tutunjian's proposal to sell City Hall to the Judge Development Corp. and move city government to the Verizon Building on Sixth Avenue and Broadway. On Wednesday, the mayor said the building is indeed for sale. There will be a public hearing on the matter at 6 tonight in City Hall.

The Verizon Building has no elevator, and likely needs more adaptation to become, at the least, accessible according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, let alone inviting to the community it should serve; chambers to house public meetings need to be constructed.

These are not small costs, but the city doesn't have estimates for the renovations, just guesses.

The committee considering the proposal does not have a complete proposal to review. The deal, which views the two buildings as equivalent in value, was made public late last summer and seemed to me a bid by the mayor to appear a mover and a doer right before last November's election. Jim Conroy, who was running against Tutunjian, called the swap illegal, claiming that the administration could not sell city property.

The city never issued a request for proposals, yet the mayor assured his public that other proposals had been made, and that Judge's was the best. The only way to know that it is to have a formal process, but the mayor is acting like the City Hall sky is falling and Judge is claiming to have other parties interested in renting the Verizon building.

I say let them.

Or maybe Troy needs another hole in the ground. Now that we've been granted Restore NY funds to demolish City Hall -- other cities directed portions of this redevelopment money to residential areas, but Troy dedicated its request to make several sites "shovel-ready" for commercial endeavors -- we are poised to repeat some terrific Troy mistakes.

Remember the Uncle Sam Mall Project?

In the late 1960s, William De Vane carried his dream of suburbanizing downtown Troy all the way to Washington, where he secured federal funds to demolish several blocks of downtown. While there were drawings of what might be done on the site, developers were not secured. The state of New York said it would financially support the mall should other financing fail, and so the Troy Urban Renewal Agency bought buildings from Broadway to the Green Island Bridge. The agency relocated residents and businesses, and demolition began. Buildings came down, and fences went up, and Troy waited.

Developers came and went like guests at a party. No one wanted to fund the mall. The idea of a new Troy mall, as good as Colonie Center, grew old, and the state reneged on its promise to pay for new construction. Finally, Carl Grimm bailed out the city and built the Uncle Sam Atrium.

Some people remember the whole mistake as Grimm's folly, though he filled the Big Hole, and did not dig it. I see parallels in this round of redevelopment excitement. While the mayor assured concerned citizens that there would be a guarantee of construction from the Judge Corp., what is to prevent that group from bankrupting itself and abandoning the city? Given the mortgage crisis, talk of recession and other very local concerns, chances are good we could lose out on these demolitions.

There are no drawings of the high-end housing Judge has in mind for our riverfront property. The planned footprint reveals that public access to the river will be squeezed down to a narrow path. Troy's median income is comparatively meager, and yet plans for luxury apartments in the city are abundant.

Just how many people in Troy can afford to live like kings? No marketing surveys have been done, but reading the newspapers shows the waters are iffy, if not icy. A project to place high-end housing in the former Haskell School was recently abandoned, and plans for the former Mooradians' furniture warehouse and store to become condominiums were recently scrapped.

Then there is the question of design. City Hall is in a historic district. The Historic Review Board was disbanded when the current administration began steering the city, and the approval habits of the Planning Board are worrisome.

Living in a city without many resources, I can understand why the government and some citizens think we have to respond when

money talks. But time is a precious resource, too, and we should not be so shortsighted that we forget the recent disasters that shaped our cityscape. The life of a city is not a race.

Amy Halloran is a Troy writer.

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