

### Rebuilding Troy would sure beat demolishing its historic sites

Amy Halloran

#### Op-ed column: Putting the city back together



Jeanne A. Benas/For The Sunday Gazette

In Troy, both Proctor's Theater and City Hall were recently declared unusable. Such a term is often applied to a building that is in the way of an idea, and I am afraid that my city will sacrifice its last grand theater, and a civic foothold on the riverfront in the latest rush to rebuild our urban center.

Troy has already survived a tough era of grand demolition contracts. I will keep singing my anti-demolition song until people remember that "free" demolition dollars cost a lot. Such so-called free money dug us a gigantic hole in the city's retail core in the 1970s.

The site of the Atrium and its parking garage were pits surrounded by chain link fencing for most of a decade. Federal money for demolition had been available for the asking. While the state of New York promised to fund reconstruction for the Uncle Sam Mall, the state hit a recession and couldn't follow through.

This is recent history and the past is prologue, as they say.

#### Put some money down

While people get giddy at big-ticket projects, there is no guarantee of redevelopment until drawings are approved and financing is secured.

When my husband and I bought a house that needed some repairs to bring it up to code, we had to put \$500, half the price of the repairs, in escrow before we could get our mortgage.

RPI and First Columbia should be held to the same standards, and then some. If they really mean to develop the Proctor's site, then prove it by putting some money in the bank. As for the project itself, use the office side of the structure for offices, and don't tear down the 2,300-seat theater that began in vaudeville and helped introduce movies to Troy. Schenectady and Albany have preserved their great theaters; I don't want to see ours destroyed.

Demanding that interests put money behind designs makes good business sense. We are in the midst of a recession whose proportions we can't estimate. Sure, we can get federal money to carve out Proctor's, and scrape down the mountain of concrete that is City Hall, but will we be able to find the funds to rebuild? Shave the Riverfront and Proctor's of their buildings and another generation of Trojans will see holes in the city decorated by chain link fences. But wait, then we can apply for arts grants to dress the fences with murals.

Or how about this: the City Council passes a resolution to see plans and secured financing before any demolition begins. Money sought to demolish the last grand theater in Troy is used to stabilize this relic, and the office side of the structure is restored by RPI and First Columbia. Someday, when the economy quits falling, someone will have the money to restore this castle to vaudeville. In the meantime, why rush to make more vacant space in Troy?

#### Rebuilding is an option

Instead of picking the low-hanging fruits of demolition dollars, how about digging deeper and seeking money to literally rebuild the city? Public works projects like replacing water mains could keep a lot of Trojans employed, for years. Updating infrastructure to support redevelopment seems smart, and doable. Bury the telephone lines. Get some fiber optics.

And if the colleges that surround Troy really want to invest in us, how about lending a helping hand to the institutions that

are in crisis? A little infusion of cash could go a long way for the Troy Public Library, whose two branches closed a month ago, and the Rensselaer County Historical Society, which may have to close its doors very soon. Let's rebuild Troy without the bulldozers this time.

*Amy Halloran lives in Troy. The Gazette encourages readers to submit material on local issues for the Sunday Opinion section.*