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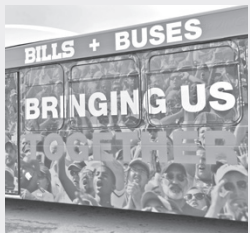
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Youngstown soliciting RFPs for Cold Storage site

Village seeks to demolish complex; residents hopeful for its future

STORY AND PHOTO BY TERRY DUFFY
Editor-in-Chief

The Village of Youngstown announced this month it is now formally soliciting a request for proposals to purchase the long-vacant Cold Storage property located at 701 Nancy Price Drive.

The village stated, "Prospective bidders must commit to complete demolition of the current structures and removal of debris upon the premises within one (1) year of transfer of the title. Bidders must demonstrate to the Village their ability to have the building demolished with the one (1) year time frame to be considered.

"Premises are being sold in an 'as is' condition. Proposals must be submitted not later than September 1, 2023 at 12:00 PM to the office of the Village Clerk, 240 Lockport Street, Youngstown, NY 14174; Clerksoffice@youngstown-newyork.us."

Village Clerk Wendy Brown said a request for bids for the property went out on Aug. 16. As of Aug. 24, there has yet to be any response.

The village action marks the latest chapter in a now decades-long effort to address the idle property that once served as a storage facility for the harvests of local farmers. The Cold Storage facility operated from 1911 to 2001, but has been vacant since that time. It is currently listed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an active superfund site for remediation, although it is not currently on EPA's active list.

According to EPA's site profile of the complex, "The former Youngstown Cold Storage facility provided local farmers with a cold storage service for harvested produce. The facility was established in 1911 but it has not been used since 2001 as a result of changes in the handling of produce. The facility is currently owned by a corporation of farmers.

"The site consists of one, three story stone building (warehouse) and a single-story brick building (icehouse) situated on 2.4 acres in a residential area. ...

"During an investigation on September 5, 2003, by officials from the Village of Youngstown, anhydrous ammonia vapors were detected in both buildings. Real time ammonia monitors indicated levels in the icehouse of 25 to 30 ppm and in the warehouse at 140 to 155 ppm. The NIOSH Time Weighted Average (TWA) is 25 ppm and the Immediately Dangerous to Life & Health (IDLH) limit is 300 ppm.

"On September 8, 2003, someone



The Youngstown Cold Storage complex across from Veterans Park on Third Street.

entered the site and opened a one-inch pipe valve on the ammonia system. A neighbor noticed the release, jammed a broomstick up the pipe to stop the leak and called the fire department.

"In addition to the ammonia release, various containers were observed on the ground floors of both buildings. Container sizes ranged from 55-gallon steel drums to less than five gallons. The containers themselves were in varying stages of deterioration. Spilled material was evident on the floors. Visual inspection indicated the presence of oils and other lubricants.

"The NYSDEC requested response and removal assistance from the US EPA on September 9, 2003."

In recent years, various proposals have been considered, but not much progress made on addressing the future of the complex. These ideas have included plans by Woodcock Brothers Brewery; proposals by developers for apartments; a theater complex; and plans for retail, including a proposal by Dollar General. Nothing has come to fruition.

Under the administration of former Mayor Raleigh Reynolds, an agreement was reached in early 2022 with Harold Hibbard of Metro Environmental and Contracting Inc. of Niagara Falls to acquire the Cold Storage building for \$1, demolish it, develop the property, and return it to village tax rolls.

That plan didn't happen. Instead, in October 2022, current Mayor Robert Reisman applied to Empire

State Development, under the Restore New York Communities Initiative, seeking \$300,000 in funding to demolish it.

The application was denied.

This plan has raised concerns from at least one former village official.

"There is a serious safety risk with the Youngstown Cold Storage building owned by the Village of Youngstown," Mark Fox said. "The building is collapsing upon itself, with the roof and several floors having fallen in.

"Several village boards, including when I was a board member and deputy mayor, have tried to market it to developers, but the cost of the demolition has always made the projects financially impossible."

Fox said that, in each case, the cost of demolition exceeded the value of the property necessary to make the project viable.

"Last year, before I left the Village Board, after our last attempt to market it to Dollar General failed ... I came out at a meeting and said enough was enough," Fox said. "We need to start to find a way to demolish it regardless of the fact it would cost the village. It is a safety hazard; it is a safety issue that cannot be allowed to continue.

"The building is a serious safety risk – it is constantly being broken into. I have donated use of fencing to the village at no cost to try to keep it secure, but it is impossible keep children out."

Attempts to contact Reisman on the matter were unsuccessful this week, as he is currently out

of town.

Brown said the state grant was denied due to incomplete information provided by the village.

"They (Empire State Development) wanted more details," she said.

State officials review various criteria, including whether a municipality could be considered a distressed community, and apparently the village, at the time, failed to provide sufficient information, she noted.

"They assign it (the application) by a point system. We didn't score high enough," Brown said.

In the meantime, the site's future continues to be a discussion item in the community.

Local resident Brandon Stack commented on the Village of Youngstown Facebook page, "That's kind of a shame," as to the proposal to demolish the structure. "It's historical now. In my opinion it should be remodeled and used as a museum to teach kids about the history of Youngstown. It may cost more but come on, don't be cheap."

Resident Simler DeGolier commented, "Housing with community space would be great (for the complex). Research shows the housing inventory is low in this area."

Brown did not elaborate on discussions for any future plans by the village on the Cold Storage building, beyond the current RFP. Nonetheless, she expressed hope for its future.

"The stonework is beautiful, there's historic value there," Brown said.

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