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Lack of funds stall Homer Glen efforts for barn preservation

Comments

September 16, 2009

BY SUSAN DEMAR LAFFERTY

Surrounded by Will County historic preservationists and Tilsy family members, Kathleen Konicki continued her push to preserve Homer Glen's Tilsy barn Tuesday morning.

As a Will County board member, she managed to spare the barn from the wrecking ball two years ago, promising to raise money to preserve it.

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Rick Collins from Trillium Dell Timberworks examines the structural integrity and likes the high quality workmanship including the angled cross beams supporting the corner of the barn.

SouthtownStar Photo by Joseph P. Meier
PHOTO GALLERY



Saving Tilsy Barn

TIMELINE

1884: Built by the Tilsy family at 163rd and South Bell Road.

1988: Bought by the Forest Preserve District of Will County.

2005: County board member Kathleen Konicki successfully lobbied to salvage the barn's wood for Homer Township's Trantina Farm project, which fell through because of a lack of money.

July 2006: County board rejects a request to landmark the barn.

November 2006: Trillium Dell Timberworks reports the barn is in "remarkable condition" for its age, but is on the brink of major problems. The structure is sound, despite its outward appearance.

March 2007: County board agrees not to demolish and gives Konicki time to raise money for preservation.

Money continues to be an issue in saving this timber frame structure at 163rd and South Bell Road, which the family claimed was built in 1884.

After a newspaper article last month questioning the barn's worth, Konicki urged supporters to show up Tuesday, but was the only county board member there.

Rick Collins, of the Knoxville, Tenn.-based Trillium Dell Timberworks, evaluated the structure of the barn in November 2006 and again this week. Except for the south wall, the structure is stable, but that limestone wall "could go at any time," he said Tuesday. This would not cause the barn to fall because its timber frame construction is "high quality craftsmanship," he said. It would, however, collapse over time.

"A strong wind could cause the south wall to collapse. It is a concern, for sure," Collins said, estimating it would cost \$20,000 just to shore up the limestone wall.

Konicki is hoping to buy more time to seek grant money for the barn's restoration.

The Forest Preserve District of Will County bought the land in 1988, fenced off the building for safety reasons and recommended demolition. It's been in limbo ever since the county board rejected a request to make it a local landmark in July 2006.

County preservationists would like to see this classic example of a banked three-bay threshing barn restored, "but money - we hadn't gotten to that," Virginia Ferry, president of the county's historic preservation commission said.

Others talked Tuesday about the importance of saving it for future generations, using it for living history demonstrations, building trades classes and other educational purposes.

A restored barn would be "a nice memorial for my husband," said Francis Tilsy, wife of previous owner James Tilsy, a former Will County official.

Andrew Hawkins, the forest preserve district's superintendent of planning and development, said Collins was asked to return to the site to re-evaluate the barn's structural integrity and get updated costs. He hopes to have a written report to give the forest preserve's operations committee in October.

Cory Singer, president of the forest preserve board, said he does not know if other board members will see the Tilsy barn as a priority. "We have to evaluate initial and ongoing costs," he said. Given that the county is facing a projected \$1 million deficit in 2010, Singer said he is "not inclined to spend money on a barn."

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