

Restoring a bit of history

Old buildings will get turn-of-the-century look

By Casey Hane
staff writer

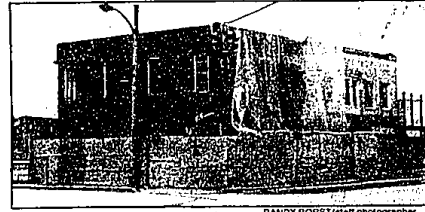
It's a project that moves the city forward, yet takes it back in time. The heart of downtown Farmington will have a new, yet old look this summer, as two historic buildings at the southwest corner of Grand River and Farmington Road are restored to a turn-of-the-century look.

According to city assessment records, the corner building was constructed in about 1870; the other, due west, boasts an 1895 heritage. Fixing up such buildings "adds a little charm to communities, and

Farmington is one of them that still has charm," said architect Ken Czarnomski, of the Farmington Hills firm of Architectural Resources, which is handling the job. "It's nice to see people wanting to preserve that."

"It'll read like part of the old city block — one type of architecture next to each other."

The \$200,000 renovation — modest in cost but workable by architectural standards — will bring back the original half-brick facade on the corner building and an overall spruce up of both buildings.



RANDY BOST/Staff photographer

The historic building on the southwest corner of Grand River and Farmington Road, and another just west of that, are being renovated and will likely be completed by the end of June. The corner building will have a darker brick facade, reminiscent of how the building looked when it was built in 1870; the westerly building, circa 1895, will be renovated using the lighter brick facing.

MOST RECENTLY, the home of Pictures & More, the corner building will have a reddish-black brick similar to the neighboring Masonic Temple and a new cornice. The building next door will retain a lighter brick. Together, they will allow room for up to three retail tenants, and seven small apartments will be maintained on the second floor.

All electrical, plumbing and heating systems are being redone from the basement up, according to the owners.

Building owners Mohinder and Duneant Chaittha have planned the renovations for more than 1 1/2 years, and view the project as a long-term investment. "The main driving force is really that... it's a very important corner," said Mohinder. "We feel this is a corner where if you invest money, you gain two ways — both for business and for downtown."

THE CHAITTHAS relocated in December from Livonia to a Salem Township farmhouse, which they will also renovate.

One of the reasons for the lengthy planning was the care taken by Farmington planning officials in approving the renovation, which architect Czarnomski said required several proposals.

Now that work is under way, the city has given special permission for Sunday construction hours so the work can be done quickly.

City Manager Robert Deadman said because the area of the construction is so crucial, the city wants to have it done as soon as possible.

Weather permitting, the Chaitthas plan to complete the project in late June.

They also received some \$50,000 — one quarter of the project — in federal loan subsidies and rehabilitation grant money through Oakland County's Community Development Department, which took time. Because of the federal funds, rent for the upper level apartments will be controlled, said city officials.

IN ADDITION to using a local architect, the Chaitthas got feedback from others, including structural engineers, the city's Historical Commission, the Farmington-based Masonic Institute of Michigan, the state of Michigan, and student architects from the University of Michigan and Lawrence Technological University in Southfield.

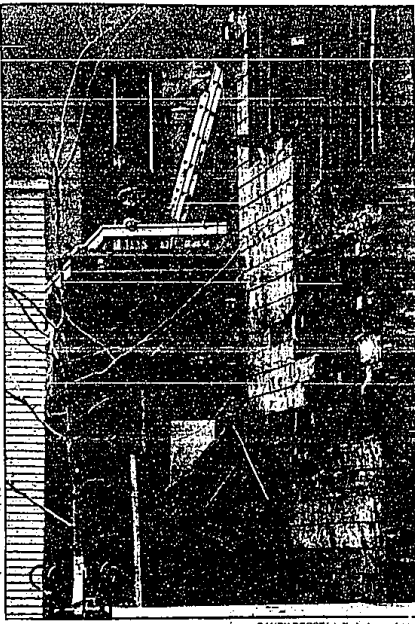
"In fact, it's an important building to the city," said Farmington's assistant city manager, Robert Schultz, who coordinated the effort on behalf of the city. "One of a few buildings dating from the turn of the century."

"It's a pretty good project."

Prior to Pictures & More, the building served as a hardware store and, years ago, a harness shop, according to local historical accounts.

It does not have a historic label, as do other older buildings in the community, but is simply known as the "Chaittha building" after the current owner, who will have owned the property six years this June.

Pictures & More is relocating downtown.



RANDY BOST/Staff photographer

A construction worker reviews work done on the rear wall of the Chaittha Building at the southwest corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. City officials are pleased with the facade spruce-up on the historic building, which sits at the heart of the city's downtown.

Witnesses: Suspect spoke of murder plans

Continued from Page 1

that evening from the Village Place restaurant in West Bloomfield.

Bonelli had it all planned out, Kasgorgis testified. He would strangle Fracchia, throw her in the water, put beer bottles on the beach and make it "look like an accident."

KASGORGIS SAID he refused to give him a ride, ended the conversation and told no one about Bonelli's plans except for one close friend. Nader told a similar story. He was called by Bonelli twice on Tuesday with a request for a ride from Orchard Lake in the early morning hours Wednesday, but was not specific about the reason.

In a Wednesday phone call, Nader

said, "He said he was going to kill her." He needed to be picked up near the lake at 12:30 a.m.

On Thursday, Nader said, Bonelli called and "said she was no longer living." He asked for help in returning Fracchia's Beretta to the scene of the crime.

That evening, both drove to the water pump control station on the north shore of Orchard Lake where Fracchia died, Nader described. Nader stayed across Commerce Lake in his own car. After dropping off Fracchia's car, Bonelli entered Nader's car, Nader said. "He said he had turned the headlights on her and she was still in the lake, Nader said.

On the return trip to Bonelli's

home, Nader said Bonelli told him how Fracchia died.

"They went to the lake together and walked out by the lake," he testified. "He started to massage her shoulders and took a rope out of his pocket and tried to strangle her."

"Something went wrong. It got caught in her mouth or something. He got scared and threw her in the water, jumped in after her and held her head under water. He held her under, until it was safe I suppose."

Asked why Bonelli killed her, Nader said, "She was getting in the way of him and his girlfriend (Venus Asmar)."

NADER ADMITTED supplying

Bonelli with gloves and marijuana which he placed outside his home for Bonelli to pick up Wednesday. "He asked for it. I owed him a favor," Nader said. He left him a good luck note, but said he only half-believed Bonelli was serious.

Nader is expected to be charged with being an accessory after the fact — a five-year felony — in the Fracchia's death but insisted on testifying in spite of defense attorney Andary's warnings that the informa-

tion could be held against him. Nader's attorney was in court at the time and counseled Nader to admit his part.

Three witnesses for the prosecution were called by assistant prosecutor Fred Miller in the one-hour exam. No witnesses were called by defense attorney James Andary of Detroit.

Bonelli's defense is expected to be based on insanity. Andary implied Bonelli was being treated by a psy-

chiatrist prior to Fracchia's death for severe "mental and psychological problems."

Andary asked that a reasonable bond be set so that Bonelli could continue psychiatric treatment. "He requires more intense therapy than ever before," Andary said.

That motion was denied. Bonelli is a former North Farmington High junior. Since Jan. 23, he has attended the Farmington Training Center.

Park's visitors center will get asbestos repairs

By Joanne Mallazewski
staff writer

Preparing the 63-year-old Eleanor Spicer estate house for public use by removing or safely enclosing asbestos in the house will be done by June 1, before planned architectural restoration work is begun.

Asbestos-related work will cost \$105,000 out of a maximum \$403,800 one-year restoration project for the historical house, designated as a visitors center in Heritage Park, on Farmington Road between 10 and 11 Mile.

Three bids were taken Monday from contractors for the asbestos work in the plaster walls, pipe coverings and linoleum. "We will have a recommendation, unless we run into a snag, which I don't foresee, at the city council meeting Monday evening," Potter said.

Some of the asbestos will be removed and some will be encapsulated — painted over to prevent asbestos fibers from being released. In some areas, false walls will be erected to enclose asbestos-laden plaster walls. The false walls also will allow for new electrical wiring to be installed without running it through the asbestos, special services director Dan Potter said.

THE ASBESTOS work prompted city officials to change what was originally a three-year phased restoration program to a one-year program. But the one-year program was challenged in January. Parks and recreation commissioners and some city council members suggested delaying the program pending possible application for a state grant to help pay for the restoration.

About a month later, parks and recreation commissioners decided to proceed when it was evident the Michigan Outstate Equity Grant was inappropriate for the project. "At the most, we might get an allocation of \$30,000, and if we were extremely lucky, \$50,000," Potter said. "It really wasn't worth holding up the project for a potential \$30,000 grant."

Restoration work to preserve the house and transform it into a visitors



FILE PHOTO

This is a view of the Spicer estate house from the west.

Restoration work to preserve the house and transform it into a visitors center is expected to begin in early July. Bids are scheduled to be requested in mid-May and awarded in late June.

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WORK ON the house exterior will include repairing and restoring stucco surfaces and deteriorated wood and replacing fascia boards.

Bedroom and bathroom walls will be knocked down to create larger open areas. In the south wing, for example, walls will be removed to allow for an office, and interpretive area — a large meeting room with displays.

In the north wing, the two bedrooms and bathroom will be removed to provide for an orientation room. The kitchen and pantry will become public restrooms, accessible for handicapped visitors.

In the main portion of the house, the library will be used as a conference room. The living room will become a reception area and the dining room an information center.

A state grant, scheduled to be awarded this summer for further development of Heritage Park, includes money for the estate house. With the grant, a new roof, storm windows and doors and some site work will be done, Potter said.

WHITE WITH BLACK



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