

Developer holds out hope for Old Town Hall

BY VALERIE OLANDER
STAFF WRITER

Developer Herman Frankel is holding time to save West Bloomfield's Old Town Hall from falling into the hands of a private bidder. Frankel handed over a \$5,000 check to West Bloomfield officials Monday to stall any real estate negotiations for the next four months. The Old Town Hall is still on the market and will be advertised, although officials will not be able to negotiate a deal until the final study is completed and a recommendation is turned over to the board.

During the four months, Frankel will ask for support from various community groups, including the League of Women Voters, the Chamber of Commerce, Concerned Citizens and the school

district in what may be the final effort to save the historical building for a public facility.

A grassroots effort has been in the works for nearly two years to turn the building into a youth center or senior citizen center. So far, the committee has failed to come up with a concrete plan to finance the renovation and programming.

If the citizen group comes up with a plan during the next four months the \$5,000 will be used for renovating the old building. If not, Frankel's \$5,000 will be contributed to the township's general fund.

By accepting the contribution, the township board made it clear that it's not interested in an offer made by resident J. Robert Gillette in September to turn the

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building into assisted living apartments for senior citizens.

Gillette agreed to buy the building for \$525,000, subject to rezoning and financing. The idea has been discussed numerous times by township officials. However, his \$5,000 deposit has never been accepted.

"I've had no dialogue with the township since I made the offer. I've been waiting for someone to get back to me," Gillette said.

The 60 to 80 units, dining room and activity area would be managed by American House, which also has facilities in Royal Oak, Birmingham, Rochester Hills and Livonia. Gillette predicted the renovated facility would generate \$60,000 in taxes annually.

Frankel told the board they would not be committing to anything by accepting his check. "There are no valid offers. You

have nothing to lose," he said. "I'd just like a crack at it when it's not a political issue."

He added: "It's not a matter of a legal issue. It's an understanding. This has been handled abominably and I'm not blaming anyone. Just look at it as a good faith option."

Longtime resident Louis Konor opposed the idea, calling the building a "money pit" and a "rat trap."

"It's a dump, recognize it," he said.

According to figures obtained by Frankel from treasurer Denise Hammond and township planner Tom Bird, a resident living in a \$250,000 home would pay 57 cents a month to maintain the building at an estimated cost of \$100,000 per year. Frankel said at least half

of the maintenance costs would come from renting it to community organizations.

Renovation also is expected to cost \$500,000 or a "one time cost of approximately \$34.33" to residents living in a \$250,000 house, he said.

Frankel claims his motivation isn't nostalgia but rather the township's need for public facilities. The building will be needed to house city services later down the road, he claimed.

Township trustee Michael Schwartz said he agreed with Frankel's offer since "no realistic bid" has been made. He also would like to see it retained by the township for public use. Other townships the size of West Bloomfield have various facilities for the public to use, he claimed.

Lost girl turns up in elevator

BY CASEY HANS
STAFF WRITER

A Southfield elementary school student is safe and well, despite being stuck in an elevator in the Franklin Park Towers apartments for more than six hours last week.

The aunt and legal guardian of little Kori Saxon said she began to worry when the 7-year-old didn't arrive home at 3:45 p.m. Tuesday — the time she usually gets home from school. Pamela Saxon first called school officials, then contacted police. Hours were spent by police and school security personnel searching school buses and apartment grounds until an apartment maintenance person found Kori in an elevator which was apparently awaiting repair.

She was discovered between 9:30 p.m. and 10 p.m., some six hours after she entered the elevator. The elevator had stopped between floors, and Kori was too frightened to press the emergency button, her aunt said.

"She said when she got on the elevator she started crying," Saxon said. "She started praying and fell asleep. She just crawled in a corner and went to sleep."

"I was so glad to get her back — I'm just so glad it's over."

"According to Saxon, there was no sign on the broken elevator warning Kori or other residents not to use it. 'They evidently knew the elevator was broken,' she said. 'There are older people living here too, and this could have happened to them.'"

Franklin Park Towers management did not return calls to the *Observer* to comment. Saxon said a manager told her she would take Kori on a tour of the building and point out what to do in the case of a future emergency.

On Tuesday, Kori left MacArthur Elementary School at the regular time, taking a shuttle to Eisenhower Elementary and then taking her regular bus home. She walked into the apartment building with a friend who saw her get into the elevator, but she never reached her fifth floor apartment. Southfield school board members were apprised of the situation during a study session that evening, and administrators monitored the situation closely until they received word about Kori being located.

Southfield public information officer Lowell Moore said police were called in on the case at about 8:54 p.m., after school officials had exhausted the search on their property and school buses. The officers eventually found a person at the apartment complex who had seen Kori getting into an elevator, then tracked down a maintenance person who pried open the elevator door and discovered the trapped second grader.

"It was undoubtedly a relief for her — and definitely a relief for us," Moore said. "We were worried. We're all parents, too."

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