

Daily Herald

Big Picture - Local Focus

Cook building not part of historic district plan

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Residents on Elgin's northeast side are moving closer to creating the city's fourth historic district — but they left out one of the most significant buildings in their neighborhood.

Developers from Ryan Companies have said they are interested in moving Cook Communications Inc. out of its more than century-old building along North Grove Avenue and demolishing the structure to make way for townhouses.

Neighbors said they would oppose the plan if the publishing building is demolished. And at a recent Northeast Neighborhood Association meeting, residents discussed pursuing historic district status to protect the building as well as their homes.

But thoughts of becoming a historic district began long before residents learned of the potential demolition of the Cook building, said Kerry Kelly, president of the group.

And the neighbors realized that including the Cook building in its proposed historic district only would create more controversy, she said.

"The city council would still have to ultimately approve it," she said. "And they didn't want to jeopardize their ability to get historic district status because of the Cook building."

The proposed area, known as the D.C. Cook/Lovell area, includes homes west of Douglas Avenue, following south on River Bluff Road, including Slade to Douglas avenues, Grove Avenue through the 800 block, Lovell Street west from the Spring-Douglas Historic District to midway between Grove Avenue and Brook Street, and north on Brook Street from Lovell, including the 700, 800 and 900 blocks.

Of the 88 homes included in this area, 73 percent of residents signed petitions to become a historic district — enough to include the Cook building even if the its owners did not want to be part of the protected area.

But forcing the building to join wouldn't be fair when a deal is pending on the property, said Betsy Couture, a member of the neighborhood association.

The deal is "up in the air," said Tim Hennelly, vice president of development for Ryan.

The contract with Cook Communications Ministries — which would have moved the nonprofit Christian publishing company to Randall Crossings Business Park near Randall and Big Timber roads — also being built by Ryan Companies — has expired.

The company now is focusing on finding ways to incorporate the middle portion of the structure into a new development that still makes sense money-wise before moving forward with building along Randall road, Hennesly said.

"And it's clear they will fight us all the way if we take down the building," he said of the neighborhood. "And we don't want to get in the middle of a fight. We're just trying to keep a business in the city."

But instead of just threats, residents have met with Hennesly and presented ideas and architectural renderings on how to save the building.

"The neighborhood did a great presentation and were very organized," he said. "For the amount of work to rehab the building compared to the square footage you can sell, the numbers don't pencil out.

"But the middle portion has great historical value, and maybe that's the way we can do it."

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