

Daily Herald

Big Picture Local Focus

Elginites hope to save old building

They want to save at least a vestige of the Cook building

Daily Herald Staff Writer

Posted Friday, May 26, 2006

Even though the Cook Communications Ministries building is pegged to become Elgin's next condominium and townhouse development, the neighborhood isn't about to let the century-old building go without making its feelings known.

About 50 residents attended the Northeast Neighborhood Association's meeting last week where the fate of the structure along Grove Avenue was the main topic.

"We have no real power unless we get it in a historic district real quick," said Karen Matthews. "It's a private company to private company deal."

The nonprofit agency that publishes Christian materials plans to sell the property to developer Ryan Companies US Inc. In return, Cook would relocate Dec. 1 to a 100,000-square-foot building in Ryan's business park near Randall Road and I-90, said Mike Hastings, Cook's senior director of logistics.

Ryan Companies still is completing environmental testing and must meet with city officials before construction can move forward. But the 240,000-square-foot building likely will come down, said Tim Hennelly, vice president of development for Ryan.

"I can't imagine a scenario where the building will be saved," he said. "That's why we suggested to the neighborhood association that we meet onsite to analyze the condition of the building.

"It just doesn't work for the site to save that building."

Ryan has invited members of the neighborhood association to the site in June to discuss thoughts and concerns about the project.

"This development really will help the neighborhood," Hennelly said. "It's going to be a bigger benefit than the neighborhood anticipates to get rid of that industrial use that's there now."

One of the major concerns residents have is density, said Kerry Kelly, president of the neighborhood group.

"That's going to be hard to compromise," she said. "We understand they have to build a certain amount to be profitable, but we have concerns about it, too."

Preliminary studies have shown Ryan could fit 150 to 200 units on the 10-acre site. Whether that's how many units will be built remains to be seen, Hennelly said.

Residents also plan to present examples of successful projects that have incorporated dated structures within new developments. Elgin's Shoe Factory Lofts off Congdon Avenue turned an old shoe factory into loft-style living.

Some residents asked association leaders to consider trying to save only the facade of the Cook building, and maybe remove its attached wings.

Others objected.

"Tearing the wings off of a building like that is like tearing the fins off of a '57 Chevy," said Dennis Roxworthy. "How's it going to look?"

Kelly reminded the crowd of the importance of having a developer that is willing to listen.

"This is a developer that is willing to talk," she said. "If another one comes in, we're dead and it could get really contentious."

[dailyherald.com](http://www.dailyherald.com)