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Mitch Gruber
City Council member

Cobblestone house still awaits renovation

Neighborhood groups offer ideas for city-owned property

Justice Marbury

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Rochester indicated it wanted to preserve the last cobblestone house in the city over two years ago.

When the previous owner offered to donate the house to the city, it had been slated for demolition to create a Dollar General parking lot.

Now, almost a year since the city took ownership of the property, the Lockwood-Alhart house, built in 1835 at 1090 Culver Road, sits boarded up with no plans for what to do with the historic structure. Vacant since 2011, the

house accumulated 28 code violations in 14 years, according to WXXI, including a crumbling exterior and roof, mold, missing gutters and rodent infestation which have since been resolved, according to the city.

The number of violations could not be confirmed with a representative from Rochester’s Bureau of Buildings and Compliance, who said the city doesn’t keep record of previous violations once they’ve been closed.

“The cobblestone house was neglected for more than a decade by an absentee landlord. That type of neglect takes time and money to undo,” said City Council member Mitch Gruber. “The city did the right thing in taking title to the property from the absentee landlord.”

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House

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Rochester neighborhood groups push for a plan

Next steps for the property include a city assessment to evaluate needed repairs, said Beechwood Neighborhood Coalition president Kyle Crandall.

“The city has also been very cooperative in working with the neighborhood groups to strategize what its next use could be,” Crandall said, adding that once the city or developers provide options for use of the property, the coalition plans to get community input and “work with the city to develop a plan for rehabilitation.”

The house is on Culver Road, which runs between the North Winton Village and Beechwood neighborhoods.

Currently, it is unclear how much it would cost to remediate the issues to make the building usable.

In August 2023, the deal was made with the agreement that Arthur Kirsch — the now-deceased former owner — would be free from fines from code violations and be offered a tax write-off. Due to the house being on a lot that needed to be separated from the surrounding strip mall, it took some time for it to come under city ownership.

According to property records, the rest of the land is owned by Kirsch Land LLC.

Land Bank secures ownership as community waits for a plan

On Jan. 7, 2025, the Lockwood-Alhart’s purchase was secured by the Rochester Land Bank Corp.

“We are extremely grateful that the city of Rochester heard the petitions of

the local neighborhood groups and intervened, purchasing the house and having it in the city land bank,” said Crandall.

There aren’t currently any plans for renovating the building or putting requests into developers’ proposals, but neighborhood groups have already shared a few of their ideas, such as turning it into the area’s neighborhood services center.

“Stabilizing ownership was the first step, and now we need to work with neighbors, nonprofits and the private sector to create a plan and the financing to revive this property. Decades of neglect won’t be fixed in a few years, but we are on the right track,” said Gruber.

Crandall said the planning process is headed in the right direction, despite the lengthy timeline.

“While this is taking time, it is extremely important that we get the future use of this site correct,” said Crandall.