



\$1M goes to city for downtown

By Jake Palmateer
Staff Writer

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ONEONTA _ The city of Oneonta will receive \$1 million to renovate the former Bresee's complex as part of Gov. Eliot Spitzer's "City-by-City" plan.

But the governor was unable to make the announcement in person Tuesday as scheduled.

Low-lying clouds above the Oneonta Municipal Airport forced Spitzer's plane back to New York City, Mayor John Nader said to a packed room at Foothills Performing Arts Center.

The governor has unveiled City-by-City projects in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica/Rome and Binghamton, where he was earlier Tuesday. Oneonta has been the smallest city to be awarded the funding administered by the Empire State Economic Development Corp.

In place of Spitzer, Daniel Gundersen, upstate chairman of ESEDC, told the audience a renovated former Bresee's would be a "powerful engine for economic growth," and the funding would be used to restore the facade of the main building, as well as shore up the roof and extensively renovate the interior.

Vibrant downtowns are a key to success for upstate cities, said Gundersen, Spitzer's appointed upstate economic development czar.

"It's part of what makes a city an attractive place to live, to work, to invest," Gundersen said to more than 75 people gathered at Foothills.

During a follow-up media conference, Gundersen said he did not know if the acquisition of the \$1 million in City-by-City funding will count against Oneonta's application for a \$1.5 million competitive Restore NY grant.

"We haven't determined that yet," Gundersen said.

The winners of the Restore NY grants will be announced next month, he said.

Nader said the City-by-City funding is an enormous coup for the city. It came about in part from an effort by city and county officials to convince the ESEDC of the value of the project, he said.

"I'm thrilled to the bone about this," Nader said. "Certainly, today we learned our city has a great friend in Governor Eliot Spitzer."

The city is leasing the former Bresee's from Otsego County Development Corp. for \$1 a year after city and OCDC officials engineered a transfer-of-title agreement from a third party, the National Emergency Medicine Association.

The complex's former owner, Maurice Ramos, donated it to NEMA, a nonprofit medical education organization. Ramos can write off the donation on his income taxes as a charitable contribution and avoid unpaid back property taxes.

City and OCDC officials said they are hoping to turn the former Bresee's into a shovel-ready site for a developer who would convert the property into a mix of retail, office and residential space.

An engineering study commissioned by the city this summer said the building is in danger of collapse if is not shored up by the onset of winter.

But Nader said that after further inspection, a large-scale fix for the roof does not appear to be an immediate concern, and the city has taken steps to ensure the security of the building.

The main building of the complex, which has more than 100 feet of frontage along Main Street, would be preserved, according to the city's plans submitted to the ESEDC with the Restore NY grant application. The remaining two-thirds of the complex consist of "structurally sub-standard" buildings that would be torn down to make way for at least 40 parking spaces accessible from Wall Street.

Nader said the next step will be to appoint a development committee to oversee the project, which has been funded so far by at least \$180,000 in city funding.

Renovation work on the complex is expected to begin next year.

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