



## **City: Raze part of complex**

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Staff Writer

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ONEONTA \_ City officials plan to tear down about two-thirds of the former Bresee's complex to make way for more than 40 parking spaces, according to Oneonta's Restore NY grant application.

The city is among 134 municipalities statewide applying for \$100 million in Restore NY funding as it seeks money to rehabilitate the former Bresee's in downtown Oneonta.

Oneonta's grant application for \$1.5 million is among applications totaling \$276 million for the highly competitive state-grant program.

Stefanie Zacowicz of Empire State Development said the state agency overseeing economic development will not comment on individual applications while the selection process is ongoing.

But according to the executive summary of Oneonta's grant application, the city seeks to demolish more than two-thirds of the former Bresee's, which is a complex of several interconnected buildings.

The main building of the complex, which has more than 100 feet of frontage on Main Street, would be preserved, according to the summary. 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.

Last month, the Common Council voted to enter into a partnership with Otsego County Development Corp. that involves the city purchasing the building from a third party for \$150,000 and then transferring the title to OCDC, a nonprofit economic development organization.

Restore NY is an excellent economic development tool, said OCDC Executive Manager Carolyn Lewis.

"It's really a very powerful program," Lewis said.

The former Bresee's is owned by Maurice Ramos, but he is in the process of turning it over to National Emergency Medical Association, a nonprofit medical education organization.

Last month, it was announced Ramos was donating the buildings to NEMA to avoid paying for repairs after the city declared the complex unsafe. Ramos can write off the donation on his income taxes as a charitable contribution and avoid unpaid back property taxes.

The closing is not complete between Ramos and NEMA, Mayor John Nader said Wednesday.

An engineering study completed last month warned the city of a potential roof collapse over the portion of the buildings the city is seeking to demolish.

The collapse could occur this winter unless steps are taken to shore up the roof, the study indicated.

The onset of winter in Oneonta could be measured in weeks, with heavy snowstorms an occasional occurrence in November.

Nader said city officials and department heads are devising ways to shore up the building before then.

"We met on this yesterday. We are probably going to convene again next Tuesday," Nader said.

The city is seeking recommendations from the firm that performed the engineering study, as well as from Delaware Engineering.

The city will move to secure the entrances to the building and look into installing lighting and alarms.

"We are certainly prepared to take the steps that are necessary," Nader said.

The grant application did anticipate some costs for roof repair, which can be reimbursed if Oneonta is awarded the grant, Nader said.

Not getting the Restore NY grant would obviously limit the amount of money the city could invest in the building, Nader said.

But Nader said the steps the city needs to take, such as shoring up the roof, still will be taken.

The \$300 million Restore NY program was authorized in the 2006-07 state budget and is to be administered in three phases, or rounds.

Round 2 of Restore NY is less competitive than Round 1, when 155 municipalities sought \$240 million. Round 1 resulted in \$55 million in grants for 75 projects.

The turnaround time for the grant deadline in Round 1 to the announcement of the awards was six weeks.

The city did not apply for a Round 1 grant.

"It's not something we even had any discussions on at that time," Nader said, noting that the conditions inside Bresee's were not fully realized in 2006 and the building had not yet been declared unsafe by the city.

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.

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., Rep. Michael Arcuri, D-Utica, state Sen. James Seward, R-Milford, and Assemblyman Bill Magee, D-Nelson, have indicated they support the actions of the city, Nader said.

The Restore NY program requires a 10 percent matching contribution from the applicant, which in Oneonta's case represents \$150,000.

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