



## Ex-Bresee's gets developer

**By Jake Palmateer**

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ONEONTA \_ An Ohio-based firm was selected Tuesday to redevelop the former Bresee's Department Store complex on Main Street .

Bloomfield/Schon & Partners of Cincinnati, Otsego County Development Corporation and city officials will now hash out details on what OCDC President Douglas Gulotty said could eventually be a \$4.5 million-to-\$7.5 million renovation/preservation project.

For nearly all of the last century, Bresee's Department Store anchored Oneonta's downtown.

But the 75,000-square-foot downtown landmark has sat largely vacant for more than 10 years. It has significant roof damage and other problems.

The goal of the redevelopment project is to create an economically viable mixed-use building that increases foot traffic in downtown Oneonta, Gulotty said.

City and OCDC officials have said they hope to maintain the historic brick facade while creating business and housing opportunities on site.

The city is leasing the former Bresee's complex at 155-161 Main St. from OCDC for \$1 after city and OCDC officials engineered a transfer-of-title agreement with National Emergency Medicine Association last year.

The complex's former owner, Maurice Ramos, donated it to NEMA, a nonprofit medical education organization, in exchange for a tax break. Ramos had unsuccessfully tried to sell the building.

Kenneth Schon said it is his company's goal to involve the community in shaping the future of the site, which includes several separate buildings and additions between Main Street and Wall Street connected by various walls, roofs, floors and ceilings.

Unlike the two other proposals received by OCDC, Bloomfield/Schon did not include any specific details on what a redevelopment would look like.

Michael A. Treanor & Associates and Homes-4-U Development of Miami, working with

Oneonta developer James Baldo, were the other two firms that responded to a request for proposals from OCDC and the city.

"All three developers are highly qualified," Gulotty said. "The decision was based on Bloomfield/Schon's commitment to extensive engineering, structural, environmental and market due diligence, as well as their past experience in putting complex financial resources in place."

The company has a track record of seeking tax credits and other economic support for its projects, Gulotty said.

The project has received a \$1 million City to City grant from the Empire State Development Corporation, which is a state agency, and may be eligible for up to another \$750,000 in state funding, according to OCDC.

Representatives for all three proposals pitched their firms and ideas last month to the about 40 people gathered at the Greater Oneonta Historical Society.

Schon said his firm is prepared to discuss with the community what the local market can support and what is possible given the condition of the site.

"I hope that we could have a meeting similar to the one we had a month ago," Schon said.

John Snyder and John Lorence of Snyder Architects in Ithaca are working with Bloomfield/Schon on the project.

Lorence, the engineering project leader, lives in South New Berlin.

"This experience of a national restoration/development team with a local on-the-ground component that is familiar with Oneonta's needs, concerns and culture is exactly what we were hoping for," Mayor John Nader said.

The decision to select a developer was made by the OCDC board of trustees, which includes city and county officials as well as members of the private sector and the county Industrial Development Agency.

OCDC, the county's oldest nonprofit economic development organization, has traditionally handled small-business loans and grants. This is its first foray into property holding and redevelopment.

A development team consisting of elected officials and community members was formed by the city and OCDC to examine redevelopment of the site.

"The choice for the preferred development team took into account recommendations from the Bresee's Development Team, the Oneonta City Common Council and from a public forum held on April 30, 2008 at the Oneonta Historical Society," OCDC Executive Manager Carolyn Lewis said.

There was little debate over the selection Tuesday, although OCDC Trustee Michael Pentaris said he is concerned about roof problems identified in an engineering study last summer.

That report indicated the roof was in danger of collapsing.

"The very next step is to formally sign an agreement between OCDC and us," Schon said.

The agreement would include a timeframe and objectives, he said.

Many details, including who would eventually own the building, will take time to work out, Schon said

"It is anticipated that a separate LLC will be created by Bloomfield/Schon, John Snyder and John Lorence for which to develop, purchase, manage the property," said Lewis, who is also Otsego County economic development director. "At which point in the process this will take place, I do not know at this time. This is all to be worked out in the contract."

Schon said his company will need to send its own architects and engineers get an accurate assessment of the condition of the former Bresee's and what is possible on the site from a design standpoint.

"It's going to take some time," Schon said.

Gulotty indicated he would like to have the contract and evaluation phase finished within 10 weeks.

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