

Art league wants Red Cross building

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DANVILLE — Artists are known for having visions guide their work.

And local artists with the Danville Art League have their eyes set on a larger building — three times the size of the group's current home on Sherman Street — to guide their future and have more art classes for adults and children.

The art league is the not-for-profit group interested in moving the former American Red Cross building on Franklin Street to make way for a planned senior housing complex.

The building would be moved about a block away to two vacant lots, across from Fire Station No. 1 at Seminary and Oak streets, to be donated by downtown homeowner Greg Thatcher.

"There was electricity in the air," art league member Carol Garver said about the group discussing the possibility and thinking it's a shame to tear down a perfectly good building.

"It has so many possibilities. Everyone got really, really excited," she said.

But to make this dream happen, the group will need to raise about \$60,000 and other steps also must go smoothly.

Officials with Sterling Development Corp. of Mishawaka, Ind. are waiting to hear about state financing by July 1 to build a senior housing complex at the site. The former American Red Cross building would be torn down.

But Garver's husband, Dave, and other West Downtown Neighborhood Association members discussed the possibility of keeping the well-maintained and perfectly-sized building for the art league's use.

Art league Treasurer Roberta Williams said there is perfect gallery, classroom, library and storage space in the building, and lots of windows.

Other buildings members have looked at are too big — such as former schools — or would require a lot more work — such as to make them handicapped-accessible — which means a lot more money.

John VanMeeter, director of development with Sterling Development, said it doesn't own the property yet. It has an option to purchase it if everything closes on the project this fall. Once he finds out about the state financing this summer, Sterling has 120 days to close on the \$8.5 million project.

VanMeeter estimates this could occur around Oct. 1 if everything goes as planned. Ground breaking on the



Danville Art League members Carol Garver, left, and Marsha Russell look at the textile art that will be auctioned off to raise funds for their new building.

Matt Huber / Commercial-News

project then would start within a week or so.

He said Sterling is willing to work with the Danville Art League, but it will have to have preliminary work done, including having a foundation and mover ready.

Carol Garver said very little remodeling would be needed for the building, "and the location is so perfect."

She said the art league could work more with CRIS Senior Services.

"We're moving ahead cautiously to make this a reality," Garver said. "There's a lot of things that have to happen."

Funding, however, is the major issue.

The brick would be knocked off the building before the move. An estimated cost to move the building, with its air conditioning and furnace units, is \$30,000. The other half of the needed money would be for laying a foundation, putting at least some of the brick back, landscaping and plumbing and electrical work.

Members have talked to some individuals about possible grants and other sources. The league also has a little money in reserves. The 100-plus member league is looking at having a silent auction for a textile art tapestry as part of its fundraising.

"To get that much space (1,100 square feet) for \$60,000 to \$70,000, it would be amazing," Garver said.

"There is a real need for a larger building," she added. "We would like to offer a lot more classes ..."

The art league celebrated its 70th anniversary last year.

Art league members now are more crowded in essentially a one-room, former mom-and-pop grocery store building. The league has been in the building since 1963. Easels and tables take up most of the room.

"Storage is a problem," Garver added. "You get 10 people in our studio and you're crowded."

The 3,200-square-foot former American Red Cross building can sit up to about 40 for a demonstration. The new building has a nice entryway, six rooms and a kitchen, the members say.

"The inside of the Red Cross building is pristine," said art league president Marsha Russell.

Former art league president Nancy Dyer and art teacher Francine Sinsabaugh initially had the grassroots dream to move into a larger building.

Art league incoming Vice President Trudy Wyatt is excited about the possibilities of offering more art opportunities to all age groups.

"What I love about the arts, is constantly learning," Russell said.

Wyatt and Garver say the art league fills a void of the loss of the arts in public schools. One room in the new building would be a permanent classroom for children.

"It's a need and a dream," Garver said.

The league regularly sponsors annual art shows and competitions, in addition to Arts in the Park. It also has classes and open studio time for members.

"We could expand and offer a lot more if we had the room," Garver said.

The league also could lease out the building to other non-profits for meeting space.

"We would love to move and love to have this happen," Garver said. "I think it would benefit our community."

The members said they'd love to be in the building by Christmas.

"We see the possibilities of it," Garver said about this attainable goal. "It's never wrong to dream; and if it all falls through, another building might open up."

FYI

To donate to the Danville Art League's building fund for its plans to move into a larger building, the former American Red Cross building, call the art league at 442-9264. Fundraising coordinator is Jim Williams.

Upcoming art shows at the Village Mall on April 24-26: The Sharon Schmitz Regional Open Art Competition for those 18 and older; and the Town and Country Amateur Art Show with an adult and junior division for those 18 and under.

There also will be a summer arts camp for children.