

Area municipalities pin revitalization hopes on Restore NY aid

Residents will weigh in on Masse Place project

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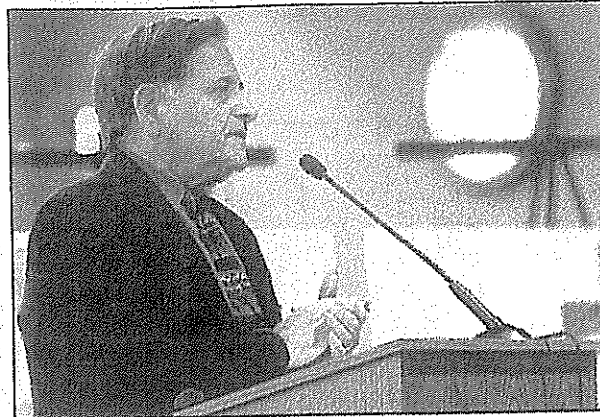
BATAVIA — Residents will get a chance to ask questions and weigh in on a proposed \$3.15 million project at Masse Place.

After more than 45 minutes of discussion Monday, City Council agreed to the next step of setting a hearing at 5 p.m. April 22 in the Council Board Room, second floor, City Hall. The hearing is required as part of the application process.

People can ask questions about the city's intent to apply for a \$2.5 million Restore New York grant to demolish a portion of Masse Place and renovate the area for future business.

"It would really open up that area and increase the tax base of the community," consultant Stu Brown said during council's conference session. "It's something the city should look hard at."

Estimated to cost some \$3.15 million, the project would not cost city taxpayers any money, city officials said. That's because the city would commit about \$50,000 of in-kind services (inspections, site plan reviews, managing the grant), City Manager Jason Molino said. The Batavia Development Corp., a non-profit group that oversees



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PROJECT PITCH: Stu Brown, grants manager, speaks at Monday's City Council meeting about the proposed redevelopment of Masse Place.

CITY OF BATAVIA

low-interest loans to local businesses, would put up \$200,000 toward the project and the developer, Joseph L. Mancuso & Sons, has promised to invest another \$400,000. The \$2.5 million Restore New York grant would cover the balance.

Brown said the city did not meet one "criteria of distress" to be considered for the grant. Of the three levels of slight, moderate and significantly distressed, Batavia did not meet any of those levels, he

said. With no "distress points in your favor," he encouraged city officials to invest more than the required 10 percent of the grant to help the city's chances of getting the money. Officials said they didn't have an exact percentage, but it would be more about 20 to 25 percent with the city's \$50,000, BDC's \$200,000 and the developer's \$400,000.

The initial phases would focus on creating sites for future businesses, with a possible long-term plan to then offer housing in the

See Masse — page A-2

Masse

— From page A-1

area, Brown said. Benefits would ideally include more business, jobs, investment and an increased tax base for the city, he said.

There have already been inquiries from "interested parties," Molino said, including a Canadian distribution company.

Ed Smart of Smart Design Architecture represented the developer. He emphasized that this project will build up that "edge" of the city. The Harvester Avenue complex has been greatly improved, he said, and now it's time to move on. There's one building in "remarkably great shape," and others that need to come down, he said.

"Demolition is critical to expose the edges of that structure, and we would make facade improvements. If we can make improvements on that other edge at Masse Place, the stimulation of the rest of the complex will significantly increase," Smart said. "I think it's 27 acres ... that's a great opportuni-



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GRANT TALK: City Councilwoman Rose Mary Christian is pictured during Monday's City Council meeting.

ty to get people to see into the area. It's such a large piece of property. It would make it that much more viable to have people living there and working there."

Councilman Rose Mary Christian was hesitant to

fully accept the pitch. She questioned why the city should get involved in revamping a private company's property.

"I'll wait and see if we get the grant," she said.

After some councilmen asked questions about the

project, Councilman Frank Ferrando said he'd had enough. The city has discussed the project at least a half-dozen times in prior years, Ferrando said. To take up another 45 minutes didn't make any sense, he said.

"How could we not go for it, to make a difference in the community?" he asked.

Councilman Bill Cox took issue for what he felt was a reprimand from Ferrando. It was a project worthy of council's time and questions before moving forward, Cox said. After the meeting, Cox, Ferrando, Council President Charlie Mallow, City Attorney George Van Nest, Human Resources Director Dawn Fairbanks and Molino had a private meeting.

Councilmen Kathy Briggs, Rose Mary Christian and Bob Bialkowski said they didn't know the reason for the closed-door session.

"So much for transparency," Bialkowski said.

Later Monday night, Mallow said that the private meeting was in fact "of a private personal nature."

"No issue before council was discussed," he said. "And there was not a quorum of council present at the meeting."