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Local man, Chicago architect try to save old church with move

By Dan Doyle

A Decatur Historical and Architectural Sites Commission member and a Chicago architect are organizing a last-ditch effort to preserve a 91-year-old church due to be razed by July and replaced by a Decatur Civic Center parking lot.

Commission member Lucien Kapp said Trinity CME Church, 345 N. Jackson St., can be moved to another location. Kapp is underwriting the cost of a study by the architect that might postpone the demolition.

The architect, Wilbert Hausbrouck of Historic Resources Co., told Kapp no

"technically insurmountable problems" would block the relocation.

Hausbrouck said the structure is in excellent condition, needing only exterior carpentry work and "some sprucing up," according to Kapp.

The commission member and the engineer on Wednesday considered possible routes over which to move the brick building to a lot purchased by the church's congregation in the 400 Block S. Webster St.

The cost of the study was paid by Kapp, although he said he hopes he eventually will be reimbursed.

Money for the study and the relocation of the church could come from a

number of sources, Kapp said.

The project could be eligible for federal matching grants for historic preservation, he said. The Civic Center Board could donate money that would have been used to raze the structure and church members could contribute unspent money from the sale of the church, Kapp explained.

"I don't want this to be a one-man campaign," he said.

Kapp said the Civic Center Board did not explore the possibility of moving or preserving the church. He said board members used "urban renewal thinking" to plan a "clean sweep" of build-

ings surrounding the church.

The church is to be demolished in early July, according to Civic Center Board Secretary Richard Lutovsky. The board bought the church and parsonage for \$100,000.

The final service at the church is scheduled June 17.

The board currently is advertising for bids to raze the building.

The Rev. C.L. Hawkins, pastor of the church, said church members are seeking approval from Episcopal headquarters before beginning construction of another church.

Kapp said he has underwritten the

preliminary study of relocating the church without consulting the Civic Center Board or the church's congregation.

"I'm taking a calculated risk," Kapp said. "I'm on very shaky ground." He said he hopes the architects' report on the feasibility of moving the church will be filed before a contract is awarded to tear down the building.

Hawkins said he doubts church members would object to using the old building instead of constructing another church if the architect's report shows the move would be financially expedient.

Kapp said he believes the Civic Center Board might hold off demolition of Trinity CME Church if the report favors moving the building 11 blocks.

Frank Grossman, a Civic Center Board member, said he foresees no objections to moving the church if the relocation is done quickly.

"Our interest is in the site and nothing else," he said. He predicted, however, that moving the building would be "most difficult if not impossible."

Because of contractual commitments, Grossman said, Civic Center construction should not be delayed to allow a lengthy relocation study.