



Sparrow indicates willingness to consider preserving the main building

Sparrow Health System has given alumni and preservationists hope that the main building at Eastern High School or at least part of it may be saved.

Dennis A. Swan, Sparrow's president and CEO, told four community leaders last week that Sparrow has no plans yet for the 18- acre site it has acquired from the Lansing School District and that it is willing to work with the community on developing a plan.

Joan Nelson, executive director of the Allen Neighborhood Center, who attended the meeting, said there were "no guarantees" and "nothing is concrete, but she described herself as "optimistic" that "at least some portion of the building" could be saved.

"The fact that they are willing to engage in a planning process including community stakeholders is really reassuring," she said.

Joining Nelson were lawyer Jack Davis, who represented the Eastern Alumni Association; former state Rep. Joan Bauer; and Valerie Marvin, president of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing. The alumni organization requested the meeting.

Bauer echoed Nelson's optimism, based on the meeting. "I am optimistic that we can together find a way to preserve at least some of the building," Bauer said.

Sparrow was supposed to provide a summary of the session, which was held at Sparrow on Friday morning, to a meeting of the alumni group Tuesday, but the meeting was canceled because of the snow storm. It has been rescheduled for 4 p.m. Friday at Eastern High School.

Late Tuesday, Sparrow shared a statement with City Pulse that also was given to the alumni association called "A shared commitment to the Lansing region."

It said Sparrow will begin a process this year "to determine the best use of the Eastern property."

"As part of this process," the hospital's statement said, "Sparrow plans to engage our neighbors, the community, and health care facility experts in a dialogue to determine the best approach to recognize and honor the historical important of Lansing's Eastern High School."

Said Davis: We anticipate that Sparrow will follow its past practice of showing great respect for community concerns. We look forward to a win- win result for the community, the parents and students at the new Eastern High School, and Sparrow Hospital."

Sparrow purchased the property which is adjacent to hospital, in January for \$2.475 million. The school may continue to use the property for up to five years. Voters will be asked in May to approve a bond issue that includes expanding nearby Pattengill Middle School to become a new Eastern High.

The sales agreement says that Spar row "shall develop a plan" that in Sparrow's "reasonable discretion protects and preserves the historical value of the property."

Robert Christensen, National Register of Historic Places coordinator at the State of Michigan National Historic Preservation Office, called Eastern "one of maybe 25 or so key buildings in Lansing, from an architectural standpoint."

Nelson described the meeting as "cordial." Besides Swan, Sparrow's senior vice president, Thomas Bres, attended.

Nelson said Bauer told them that the alumni group was "very interested in knowing whether Sparrow had any plan for the building. There was a long conversation, but the essential point is there are no plans right now."

Nelson said Sparrow is in a "transitional year" between strategic plans, with a new three- year plan set for 2017 through 2019.

"I think they were being really frank that this is a transitional moment for them and they do not have firm plans and are really interested in some point down the road, when they have begun their strategic planning process, to engage with stakeholders in a planning process."

Nelson said she expected stakeholders would include the Historical Society, the alumni association and "community representatives of all sorts. She added that nothing is going to happen this month or this summer. "Everyone has our eye firmly on passage of the bond," she explained.

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