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Board hopes new resolution will solve Dunlop problem

Derelict building is eyesore, members say

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It's the first thing southbound motorists see when entering Grand Island.

Off to the right, covered in graffiti and riddled with broken windows, the former Dunlop Tire Corp. building on Long Road is a prominent eyesore and an embarrassing ambassador for the island.

A new resolution passed by the Grand Island Town Board is a last-ditch attempt to turn the property around.

It gives the town's zoning and building officers more flexibility in levying and enforcing code violations against the property's owner, JSJ Holdings LLC.

It even reserves the right for the town to take care of the property on its own and send JSJ the bill for any expenses incurred.

"We're hopeful that by doing this, it will put some pressure on the owner to get moving once again," said Councilman Gary Roesch.

The town's resolution calls for a full inspection of the property and directs building and zoning officials to prepare a report outlining unsafe or dangerous conditions existing at the site, along with an order for JSJ to address those problems by a certain deadline.

If the violations aren't addressed by the ordered deadline, the resolution allows the town to remedy problems at the site, then to assess any incurred costs against the land on which the property is located.

Roesch said he has been working with JSJ's principal, James Metz, for years, talking to developers and state agencies, but he has "gotten nowhere."

"It's like banging your head against a wall," Roesch said. "It's something I've spent significant time working on."

Earlier this year, it looked as though the problem would soon be resolved.

Roesch helped Metz secure a contract for \$1 million from a Restore New York grant administered by the Empire State Development Corp. to reimburse JSJ toward improvements that would make the site marketable for sale. But Metz was unable to front the \$2 million required.

Metz, who also owns Beauty Pools in Lancaster, said the situation grieves him more than anyone.

He said he never planned to own the building but ended up with it after a settlement with former owners Better Senior Living Corp., which bought the building in 1999 for \$400,000.

"I ended up with a building in not a good way," he said. "I had the note on the building and had to foreclose. That's how I ended up with it, and that's the kind of shape it was in."

Metz said he has spent years and tens of thousands of dollars cleaning graffiti off the building and has fought a losing battle trying to keep vandals out. He said he is still searching for a buyer and would accept any reasonable offer, but no one will bite.

"Nobody will do anything until there is a tenant in there," Metz said.

Roesch, however, said there have been several offers to buy the property, each of which has fallen through. Buyers later complained that as they were getting ready to sign, Metz changed the terms of the deal, Roesch said.

"I can't do anything with Empire State Development or the Erie County Industrial Development Agency anymore," Roesch said. "Every time I tell them I have someone who wants to look at the property, they say, 'Sure, Gary.'"

At this point, Roesch said, the town's best hope is that Metz will install security lighting and a fence around the property to keep the vandalism at bay.

He said he worked with Verizon to place a cellphone tower on the property in hopes that Metz would use the funds to install the deterrents. He was dismayed to learn Metz was using the revenue to pay taxes on the site instead, Roesch said.

Roesch still hopes Metz will be able to come up with \$1 million for a revised plan to make the building's facade presentable and to restore heating, utilities, parking and lighting to the property. The Restore New York grant would reimburse \$500,000 of the cost. But Metz said he hasn't been able to secure a loan to take advantage of the grant.

The town is coming to the end of its rope.

"We have to put our foot down. I didn't create this. The town residents didn't create this," Roesch said. "If this doesn't get taken care of, it can only get worse."