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For immediate release

Report: Former Woolen Mill store repairs could reach \$5 million

Consultants helping Rice County leaders reimagine a portion of Faribault's Fourth Street NW told the Board of Commissioners Tuesday that reviving a piece of the city's history could cost anywhere from \$3.5 million to \$5 million, but still not return it to its former glory.

The building, at the corner of Fourth Street and Second Avenue NW, was built in the late 1890s as offices and a store for the then-blossoming Faribault Woolen Mill. When constructed, the actual mill, which had moved from a spot along the Cannon River, sat just south of the building.

Designed by Olof Hanson, believed to be the first deaf architect in America, the building featured several ornate elements, many of which have been removed or modified.

The structure, often referred to as the Klemer Building after former mill owner Carl H. Klemer, is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its application was rejected, with the National Park Service finding that its exterior had been too significantly altered.

Consultants with Wold Architects told the board that the building's foundation has deteriorated and that several exterior walls have heaved, possibly from recent roadwork. There are also signs of water damage on the building's exterior, and a new roof and new windows will be required.

The interior space would need to be completely reworked for the building to be habitable, and aging mechanical systems, including plumbing and electrical, will need to meet current building code. Costs listed Tuesday do not include historic restoration.

Commissioner Steve Underdahl questioned whether there's a need for the type of space a renovated Klemer Building would provide.

Faribault city leaders have said that there is ample available space just a couple blocks away in the city's downtown, according to county Parks and Facilities Director Matt Verdick.

The ongoing review by the county and Wold will help commissioners determine the future of the north portion of the block. That's expected later this year. The county currently owns all but one of the properties on the block.



The Klemer Building, on Fourth Street and Second Avenue NW in Faribault, was built in the late 19th century to house Faribault Woolen Mill offices and a store. Today it's facing issues with its foundation, roof and mechanical systems. (Rice County photo)



Many of the building's unique decorative elements have been removed or altered.

The review began as part of a jail study, looking at whether the current Law Enforcement Center could be modified to meet current Minnesota Department of Corrections regulations. The county's main jail, Community Corrections and Sheriff's Office are currently located in the Law Enforcement Center on the south side of the block.

County commissioners in 2021 voted to build a new Public Safety Center on the north side of Faribault after learning that costs to expand the existing building were several million dollars higher than building new.

While the Klemer Building isn't located in the city's downtown district and isn't on the National Register, putting it outside the Faribault Heritage Preservation Commission's jurisdiction, county leaders and Wold representatives plan to meet with the commission Feb. 16 to keep them apprised of the county's plans.

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