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News

The Ypsilanti Courier
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Bids approved for Starkweather house

City Council to decide on purchaser Tuesday

By Dan DuChene, Staff Writer

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Two people have put forth bids to purchase the Starkweather House from the city of Ypsilanti.

Local developer Stewart Beal and Historic District Commission member Ronald Rupert put their bid on the gifted house.

Karl Barr, the Ypsilanti city attorney handling the

deal, said both bids were submitted to the city near the

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deadline on Aug. 1. Both purchase amounts on the bids were the same at \$1 more than any cost occurred by the city.

City Council is expected to vote on a developer for the house at their next meeting on Tuesday.

"We have these two bids, there's no easy dollar figure to say which one is better," Barr said.

He said the decision would have to be based "solely who would be the best person to get that rehabilitation done."

Beal's proposal laid out a plan to invest more than \$150,000 into the historic home, donated to the city by former owner Art Campbell. With hopes of maintaining the house's three apartments, his plan included repairing the roof, foundation, windows, doors and other exterior portions of the decrepit house within the a year.

Rupert's plan, with and estimated completion in 18 months, includes many of the same exterior work but involves investing more than \$55,000.

"It's a cool property," Beal said when asked why he was interested. "It's so historic."

In a effort to capture as much rental property in Ypsilanti as possible, Beal said he hopes to purchase the Starkweather House to add to his portfolio.

Rupert said he intends to leave the house as apartments too, but just hopes to see the house restored.

"It's like cutting a diamond," Rupert said of restoring houses. "Someone could come in and do severe damage by trying to save it."

Because he and Beal both have established track records in restoring houses, Rupert said it wouldn't matter who got the house.

"It's a horse race, it's a toss up," he said. "We both have experience."

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Beal said he had only two days to construct the bid proposal because he was unaware of the circumstances on the house. Rupert's proposal dates back to April 26, when he sent a letter of intent to purchase the house to the mayor and City Council.

Discussion between Campbell and City Council on the donation of the house started in June, but Rupert said he became interested in purchasing the building during a walk-through held in the spring.

City Council member Bill Nickels, D-2nd Ward, said he had organized the walk-through to ensure Campbell still intended to gift the house to the city. He said discussions on Campbell's intent to gift the house to the city had started more than a year ago.

"Campbell's been offering to give the house to the city for a while now," Richard Murphy, a city planner, said.

"Campbell was open with the fact that he wanted to give it to the city."

Murphy said he had a list of about three other developers who were interested in purchasing the property before the bid was listed. He said the people on the list were contacted, but none had issued a bid.

The house, a farmhouse built by historic philanthropist Mary Ann Starkweather 166 years ago. The house had been a station on the Underground Railroad and had been home to inventor Elijah McCoy.

Any closing deal on the house must be reached by Oct. 1, when the property reverts back to Campbell.

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