

The former Gallon High School is shown as the backdrop for a recent rally of residents seeking to save the building from destruction. The Ohio School Facilities Commission has fanned the flame of hope for the group as it has announced a willingness to put demolition funds in escrow.

# Setting a precedent

## *Eleventh hour reprieve from the OSFC*

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The Ohio School Facilities Commission is willing to pursue the possibility of an escrow account setting aside the demolition funds for the old Galion High School, thus giving the reuse committee another option for fulfilling the Galion district's board's demands of \$800,000 tucked away in case the reuse project fails. This gives the historic building a one-year reprieve. This also opens the possibility for creating a prototype for saving Ohio school districts money.

In a letter to John Barga, counsel for the plaintiffs, and Steven Friedman, counsel for the Galion board of education, the OSFC chief legal counsel Jerry Kasai said, although the idea is a new one and has never been attempted, he is willing to give the plaintiffs and the board the final close out time on the building project to come up with a feasible escrow plan.

The idea that was presented to the OSFC by Barga and Friedman the third week in May goes something like this: The 76 percent state share of the cost of demolishing the old high school would be held in an escrow account until the reuse project either

fails or is successful. If the reuse project fails, the money would be released to the Galion district to demolish the old high school. If the project is successful, the money would be released back to the state (with interest). The \$800,000 figure was presented to the reuse committee by the board as an estimate for future demolition with rising construction costs taken into account.

In a letter to Barga and Friedman (June 3), Kasai said "the OSFC would be willing to work with the School district and your client on this matter during the interim period prior to close out. There may be approximately a *year* left in the close out period on the Galion Project. The OSFC would be willing to entertain any feasible possibilities that your client can come up with in the intervening time period."

In a letter to Kasai, Barga replied, "We are very confident that working together we can create a win-win-win solution to a problem facing Galion and other school districts throughout Ohio.

**"It is also quite likely that any plan developed through this process could be used as a prototype around the State of Ohio for other communities, all of which have the potential for saving millions of dollars of taxpayer money.**

"Please further understand that our goal is not to delay demolition of the former

Galion High School, but to prevent demolition of the School, and adapt it for reuse by the entire Galion community.

"In order to raise money and make these changes, we must have some indication of ownership to raise the money necessary to see this goal realized. Questions regarding insurance coverage, consulting fees, legal exposure, the project close out process and other policy concerns can be easily addressed, but not in this short letter.

"To achieve these beneficial results will require an exchange of ideas, discussions, and perhaps meetings, to which we are fully committed. We are confident that we can offer and will bring expertise to this process that will produce a successful project."

"By copy of this letter we are advising Mr. Friedman and the Galion School Board of our sincere desire to engage in meaningful discourse that will produce the "feasible possibilities" you suggest in your letter. We are hopeful the Galion School Board will allow us the opportunity to pursue this project on a fast track without wasting anyone's time or efforts."

The Galion board of education will be meeting tonight at the new Galion High School at 6:30 p.m. On the agenda the board will consider contracts for the demolition of the old high school building.