

San Jose Fire Museum heading to downtown

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SAN JOSE -- What's old is new again for the San Jose Fire Museum, which will be coming to downtown San Jose in one of the fire department's old fire stations.

The San Jose City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved the sale of former Fire Station No. 1, located at 201 N. Market Street, to the fire museum for \$1 million. The sale has to be approved by the state Department of Finance before escrow, meaning the keys to the building will be handed over right around March 1.

"I think it's safe to say we're ecstatic," said John McMillan, the museum's president and a veteran of the fire department. "This is going to be the start of San Jose having it's very own fire museum. We've got a lot of work ahead of us, though."



A Hook & Ladder 1 helmet is on display at the San Jose Fire Museum as part of its collection of antique firefighting equipment and memorabilia in San Jose.

Backers hope that by the year 2020, they will be able to open the museum and show off what is touted as one of the nation's largest collection of antique fire vehicles and equipment.

McMillan said the goal of the fire museum for nearly the past decade has been to not only preserve and improve their extensive collection that includes century-old engines and ladder trucks now stored in a city warehouse but to secure the funding to purchase the former downtown station, which was built in 1951.

The organization's luck has ebbed and flowed. They first tried to lease the old fire station from the city. When that didn't work out, there were concerns the building would be torn down to make way for newer buildings, but in 2012, the city designated the building as a historic landmark.

Last fall, developer Lee Brandenburg and his wife, Diane, stepped forward to front the organization the money they needed to buy the building. And in November, the building was approved for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, thus preserving the building indefinitely.

McMillan said everything has come together so quickly, that museum officials have begun meeting regularly to hash out a plan on how they can fundraise an additional \$14 million to help renovate and retrofit the building so it can be unveiled to the public in five years.

But it's going to take a lot.

Asbestos and lead paint need to be completely stripped from the building. It needs to be seismically retrofitted and then cleaned inside and out. McMillan and crew wanted to try and do it in phases, but it appears having it all done at once will save not just time, but money.

"We're trying to hit a home run here," he said.

And while there is much to be done before San Jose residents can enjoy the new locale for the museum, city council members said Tuesday while this sale seemed like a "pipe dream" not so long ago, the

persistence paid off.

"It's a historic district that's booming here and really because of the hard work and leadership of John and the generosity of folks liked the Brandenburgs, we have much to celebrate," said Mayor Sam Liccardo.



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A 1914 Knox Martin Tractor, pulling an 1899 American Steam Engine is on display at the San Jose Fire Museum in San Jose, Calif., on Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2014.