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Millstadt Village Board hears plea to save the old water tower

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The old Millstadt water tower, southerly facing vertical shot.

Tim Vizer — tvizer@bnd.com [Buy Photo](#)

By ROGER STARKEY — News-Democrat

The Friends of the Old Millstadt Water Tower made a plea to the Millstadt Village Board on Tuesday to delay any action on demolishing the village's old water tower.

"All we have asked for is time," Betty Keller Timmer said, speaking on behalf of the Friends of the Old Millstadt Water Tower. Keller Timmer presented the mayor several petitions, with more than 1,000 combined signatures, requesting the structure remain a part of Millstadt.

The old water tower served the village of 4,000 from 1931 until it was recently replaced by a new water tower. Keller Timmer said the structure should not be destroyed because it is one of the few remaining tin

man water towers in the country and a local landmark.

"We are looking to preserve and restore, but we're not sure how," Keller Timmer said.

The village and those hoping to retain the old water tower may be at an impasse. Mayor Weldon Harber said the city is not willing to seek estimates for a study to determine if the tower is structurally sound. Keller Timmer asked the village to seek estimates for the study and said her group is not currently planning to do so itself.

Harber said the city is willing to sell the structure to the Friends of the Old Millstadt Water Tower, but does not want to maintain it. "So they want to sell us a used car without kicking the tires first?" Keller Timmer said.

After the new tower was built, the presence of the old one presented Millstadt with a conundrum. Designated a historic structure by the state of Illinois, the old water tower couldn't be torn down but it was too expensive for the village to maintain.

The village successfully requested the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency remove the old water tower from its list of historic structures in 2012. With that obstacle removed, the Village Board voted to seek bids for the demolition of the tower during their Jan. 23 meeting. Harber said the village is also seeking bids to paint the tower and that it may take three months for the bids to be returned.

Calling the old water tower an "eyesore," Harber said he and the Village Board would like it removed.

"I'd like to see it torn down, myself," Harber said.

The old water tower was scaled in 2011 by a resident threatening suicide. The standoff with police and firefighters ended peacefully, but Harber said the event was used as part of the petition to remove the old water tower from the list of Illinois historic structures.

The old water tower currently has microwave equipment and antennas that are the property of St. Clair County. Harber said he has contacted the county about the possibility that the water tower will be demolished, but has not received a response from the county.

HTC spokesman Craig Hern said the company provides Internet access to 75 percent of its Millstadt customers through equipment located on the tower. Hern said HTC will move the equipment if needed.

"We will continue to work with the community to do what is best," Hern said.

The cost of moving the equipment will vary based on the new location, Hern said. If a new tower is built alongside the old water tower, the cost would be less than if the equipment had to be moved several blocks.

Constructing a new tower could cost about \$100,000 Hern estimated, but stressed that HTC has not investigated the possibility of building a new tower. If the old water tower is demolished, St. Clair County may prefer to build a new tower nearby.

Keller Timmer said her group's ability to secure more than 1,000 signatures on petitions is proof that there is great interest in preserving the old water tower.

"If interest will turn into elbow grease, I don't know," Keller Timmer said. "Elbow grease is exactly what we need right now."

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