

The Redman House on Lee Road sits in the sun Thursday. Its future is in question.

Tarmo Hannula
Register-Pajaronian



Will historic home be history?

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Redman-Hirahara Foundation still working, hoping

By JON CHOWN

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In a room above Dean Coley's massive mill shop on Lee Road, the Redman-Hirahara Foundation still continues to meet.

With notes on business plans and fundraising efforts filling a white board, and historical photos and conceptual drawings decorating the walls, the group of local residents is still holding

out hope that something positive will come of the historic Redman House that slowly crumbles away on the same street.

The foundation had owned the home until September, when it lost it to foreclosure. Now, without access to the site, the group continues to toil, working on plans and waiting for what will come next, though it doesn't know what or when that will be.

"We haven't given up today, we haven't given up at all," treasurer Barbara Powell said. "Bankruptcy was a conscious decision. There is still a house that's historic that we're dedicated to."

Meanwhile, the home's owner, GreenFarm LP, a local real estate development company operated by partners Richard

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Kelley and Owen Lawlor, has been working on its plan. Last week, Lawlor said GreenFarm had paid overdue property taxes of more than \$50,000, extended the lease to farm it for another year to Stephen Pederson of High Ground Organics and settled a lien on the property.

"We've been talking to people in the community about finding a path forward that makes sense, but we don't have anything solid just yet," Lawlor said. "We're trying to make the best of the situation and take care of business."

Powell and the Redman-Hirahara Foundation maintain that the big mistake the board made was paying too much for the home — about twice as much as it was worth, they say. The group paid \$1.9 million for it, based on an appraisal that factored in its potential value if developed. But land near Watsonville west of Highway 1 is unlikely to ever be developed and the agricultural value of the

property is less than \$1 million.

"The only mistake this board made was paying way too much for the house," Coley said. "And that occurred under a previous board."

Through a philanthropic effort partially engineered by Rowland Rebele, the group was able to offer GreenFarm \$700,000 on top of the more than \$200,000 it has already given to the firm, but that offer was rejected. Redman-Hirahara members are now waiting to see what will happen next.

"We're hoping to work with the current or any future owners of the property," said board member Bob Corbett, a local architect who has been involved in many projects in the Pajaro Valley.

And the board is watching the house. It is still structurally strong, Coley said, but the pounding it continues to take in the weather does not help. He predicted it would cost about \$4 million to completely restore it.

Ron Campbell of Fresno House Movers knows just how fragile the house is right now. As it rests on cribbing, without a foundation, it is Campbell's

equipment that holds it up. With an unpaid bill for his work on the house, Campbell had placed the lien on the home and recently negotiated with GreenFarm to remove it. He said GreenFarm paid him about \$21,000.

"They accepted the work as being done according to industry standards and assumed all liability for the house and the equipment," Campbell said. "If it collapses and kills somebody, I'm out."

Campbell said he didn't foresee his old equipment failing soon, but said he couldn't really predict how long it would hold up, either.

"Every piece of wood reacts differently to the elements. All those blocks are exposed to the elements and need to be checked regularly. Who is going to do that?" he said. "I don't know long it will stay up. It could stay up for 10 years or fall down in two, it's hard to say."

But Campbell said he did know that the house was still worth saving.

"It's a salvageable house right now and it's worthwhile for the community to keep," he said.