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## Museum to clubland? Not if the city can help it

Chicago may purchase Prairie District site

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Staff Writer

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The city may block an attempt by the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum to rent the building to a nightclub.

Photos by Josh Hawkins

The city of Chicago could decide to buy back the embattled National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum building, a proposed ordinance introduced in City Council in early April.

The city established the museum in 1996, spending \$1.7 million to purchase the building. Financial problems have recently prompted museum board members to seek a sale to investors headed by Marc Curtis, owner of the Black Orchid Supper Club.

The plan to raise money for the museum includes a lease-to-own option when the lease runs out in 2013.

"[Museum board members] have informed us that it is their intent, and we will exercise our right of first refusal should they proceed with the proposed sale to their spokesman Connie Buscemi.

Museum treasurer Jim Holtzman has said the organization is roughly \$1 million in debt. The city's offer of the facility could help the museum find its financial footing. To help support the museum in late 2006 and more recently provided a \$60,000 loan.

But the redevelopment agreement entered into by the city and the museum was intended to be used for the museum. Holtzman says Curtis' proposal would not stray far from the original plan, and he is working with museum board members to help them find a smaller, more suitable site.

Meanwhile, other public entities are considering moving into the building, including the city's arts groups and other entities that would keep the building more or less open.

And then there's the case of the Café Society, the small sandwich shop now embroiled in a legal battle to keep its doors open.

Restaurant owner Jorge Armando, who opened the café in 2001, was in court last week for not paying his rent on time.



Armando says he believes the museum is trying to push him out of the operation. Armando, who says Mayor Richard M. Daley and his wife M: at Café Society, said city officials have said the plan is to put in a comm District.

He also is collecting petition urging the city not to allow the museum to but his own battle to save his restaurant wages on.

"I think it is very good news-why, because the Prairie District needs a c

Armando's lawyer, Robert Deignan of the law firm Baker & McKenzie, s to trial.

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