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# OCU officials plan to move law school downtown to Fred Jones plant

LEGACY FAMILY HOPES MAPS 3 GIVES OLD FACTORY NEW USE AS LAW SCHOOL

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Calling it a "game changer" for development of west downtown, businessman Fred Jones Hall detailed a letter of intent Tuesday that calls for the Oklahoma City University Law School to move into the historic former Ford Model T plant his family owns.

"We're very excited," Hall said. "We see the success of the Oklahoma Health Center on the east side of downtown. We think that between OCU and maybe some other universities, we could build a music industry downtown as big as the health sciences center. And we have all the elements to have legal industry to take off down here."

The building at 900 W Main was built in 1916 by Henry Ford and sold to Hall's grandfather, Fred Jones, in the 1940s.

Jones manufactured car parts in the factory, and in more recent years the plant has been used for parts distribution. It has been sought out by multiple developers seeking to convert it to housing, retail and offices.

"Everyone likes the architecture and style of this building," Hall said. "We've had inquiries every year."

Hall said Tuesday such plans never fit his family's plans of maintaining control of their legacy property.

"We have criteria that have to be passed — it has to be a nonprofit institution that would help downtown, and at the same time allow the building to stay in the hands of the family. I think we've found that with the university."

OCU President Tom McDaniel said he began looking at options of moving the law school downtown after he was asked by Mayor Mick Cornett to submit ideas for adding an education component to a potential MAPS 3 ballot.

"We looked at a good number of locations, including First National Center," McDaniel said. "But we never had one that appeared to be financially viable — where the finances would work."

McDaniel called the old car plant an ideal location for the law school — if voters approve MAPS 3 and plans to create a downtown streetcar system. The streetcar, he said, could allow the school and the county to consider a consolidation of their two law libraries. He also noted the property is within walking distance of the Oklahoma County jail, police headquarters and municipal courts — all ideal for enhancing indigent legal aid initiatives for students.

"We want to start an innocence project — we want to be servant leaders, we want people to graduate our law school knowing there is a need to serve others," McDaniel said.

As a result, the letter of intent has a big "if" clause — the passage of MAPS 3 on Dec. 8.

"We think continued development of downtown and Core to Shore is an important element in their plans for developing the property and our plans to move the law school to downtown," McDaniel said. "We think the transit element is important. We would be bringing 750 people to downtown every day, and more than 600 of them would be students riding that transit to law offices and the county law library."

Should the ballot fail, McDaniel said, the school would have to start new discussions with members of the Hall family on whether the project is still feasible.

Hall and McDaniel estimate the conversion of the 189,000-square-foot building would cost between \$30 million and \$50 million. Hall said he would pursue historic tax credits for the building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Hall said the deal calls for him to move the distribution operation by March 2011. McDaniel, meanwhile, said the university will launch a capital campaign knowing the more it contributes toward the renovation, the lower the rent will be.

Without any architects or contractors yet hired, McDaniel said he can only estimate the school might open by 2013.

Hall said talks continue about the possibility of adding the University of Central Oklahoma's Academy of Contemporary Music to the mix (known as ACM@UCO, the newly opened school is holding classes in Bricktown).

"You will have between OCU and ACM@UCO some 2,000 students downtown," Hall said. "Think of what that can do for housing, for restaurants and shops ... this is a game changer for all of downtown."

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