

Training at train depot?

[By Ashley Gebb/Appeal-Democrat](#)

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A slice of Live Oak history may once again have a bright and vibrant future.

The City Council authorized staff this week to continue working with the North Central Counties Consortium to restore the dilapidated depot at Elm Street and Broadway and turn it into a restaurant job training site.

The former train stop sits shuttered and sagging, paint peeling from its walls and weeds sprouting up between the [weather](#)-warped platforms. The depot closed more than a decade ago from its most recent use as a restaurant, but it is at least 130 years old.

The 1,256-square-foot structure is the only known surviving depot from the defunct California & Oregon Railroad and played an important role in opening the upper Sacramento Valley to agriculture and settlement.

Now it may play a role in the future of its youth.

"None of this will be easy," said City Manager Jim Goodwin, who emphasized the proposal is only in its very preliminary stages. "It's a mess, and it will be very pricey to restore it,"

How much money it would take to complete a project of that magnitude has not been determined, but the city is looking for grant funding, he said.

The city owns the former railroad depot, as well as 10,000 square feet of property where the depot sits. A portion of the building is on railroad property leased to the city.

If the city could obtain grants to fund its restoration, it would be a great way to eliminate the blight, improve the highway corridor's appearance, train at-risk youth and provide a new restaurant experience, Goodwin said.

Staff has been talking with the NCCC Workforce Investment Board and Sutter County One Stop about collaborating to turn the depot into a restaurant job training program, similar to Checkers restaurant in Oroville.

The program would train at-risk youth ages 17 to 22 in all areas of food service.

Joe D'Andrea, director of Sutter County One Stop, is excited about the partnership because it fits perfectly with the center's youth and work programs.

Not only will it beautify Live Oak, but it offers its youth an opportunity for employment and job skills training in their own area, he said.

"It would help give them some direction," D'Andrea said. "It doesn't mean they are going to be a chef or a food service worker for the rest of their lives but it gives them the opportunity to get out there and broaden their horizons."

Any type of program that could teach Live Oak youth real-life situations, work experience and

about the real world is good, said Mayor Diane Hodges.

"College is great, but some kids realistically won't go to college," she said. "They need job skills. And if they are at risk, that could pull them out and be a positive thing for them to do."

Residents have been pushing for years to fix up the blighted building, Hodges said. "Do something with the depot," has become a familiar complaint.

Old-timers would like to keep it the way it is, new residents want it torn down and others want to keep it but turn it into something functional, Hodges said. A restaurant training program may be the perfect fit.

"It all boils down to money," Hodges said.

There is little indication of how realistic the city's vision may be. Since the depot closed, it was considered as the proposed site for a rest area, museum and information center. Developers also discussed moving the depot and filling its space with a strip mall.

But the high price tag of restoration, as well as other development costs, meant none of those improvements came to fruition. And there is no telling if this idea will be any more successful.

In addition to resolving any land-use issues, the structure will have to be restored and parking must be increased, Goodwin said.

Councilman Harold Childers said the city's biggest concern may be the railroad and taking over the building.

The path of least resistance may be to move the depot off the railroad's right-of-way, Goodwin said.

"I would like to see it moved," said Councilman Gary Baland. "That way it puts an end to any future problems and passing on a headache to someone else."

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