Seneca OKs Lunney property purchase

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THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Seneca City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved the purchase of two houses adjacent to the historic Lunney House Museum in the first steps toward developing an African-American museum.

The city had already put down $1,000 on the properties owned by the family of Bertha Lee Strickland, who worked for the Lunney House's longtime owner, Lilian Mason Lunney.

After an executive session Tuesday, the council overwhelmingly approved a motion calling for the purchase of the Strickland properties for an amount not to exceed $50,000. The last known price for the two homes in the rear of the property was $45,400.

City Administrator Greg Dietterick said, after the Lunney was purchased in 2008 in an effort to bolster the city's grasp of its own history, this purchase was a clear next step.

"It's very logical. That property was all part of the Lunney estate originally," Dietterick said. "There's a unique opportunity here to open an African-American museum, to show the lifestyles of the people that worked in the era and to also showcase the educational platform we haven't really talked about yet."

Dietterick said Seneca's rich tradition of black culture — namely self-determination through setting up its own schools, churches in the era of the Freedman Act — has been unfortunately neglected.

"There is a whole era from the Freedman Act after the Civil War to the early 1900s where we're not telling the story, and there's so much history here," he said.

Dietterick anticipates the purchase will be finalized by the end of the month.

"So much of that hasn't been told yet, and we'd like it to be told. This will be one of the first steps to do that, to really show what our history is, what we're made of," he said.

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