



Photo by Kathleen Willow

Bronwen Davies, choral director of the Oberlin schools, directs students in singing "Flowers of Love, Freedom for All," during an event Saturday to update the community on progress of the Oberlin Under-

ground Railroad Center, which will be built inside the historic Gasholder structure on South Main Street. After singing, students distributed packs of wildflower seeds to those in attendance.

Council offers annual support to Underground Railroad site

After telling the Underground Railroad Center Implementation team to raise money, get the project moving, and do something now, city council has voted to help with that first priority.

At their Sept. 7 meeting, council heard a report from the implementation team anticipating a community update on progress toward repurposing the

Gasholder building as an Underground Railroad interpretive center. Assistant city manager Darlene Colaso said the team has found money with the reauthorization of a \$917,000 federal transportation grant originally granted in 2002.

Colaso said construction documents are being prepared for stabilizing the

structure, and work could begin as soon as next year. She said the implementation team will announce a fundraising plan in the next couple months.

"We have found money, we're moving forward as quickly as possible, and we are doing something now," Colaso

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Gasholder...

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Barb Bickel, executive director of Visit Lorain County and a member of the implementation team, said she has seen high interest in Oberlin and the Underground Railroad from around the country. She said more tourists come to Oberlin for information about the Underground Railroad than for any other reason.

"This center, when it is complete, will provide a place for them to come and learn about the Underground Railroad," Bickel said.

According to the group, after the structure is stabilized, another \$2 million will be needed to repurpose the Gasholder building as an interpretive center and museum. Council vice president Sharon Soney said the city could help raise that money, and made a motion to allocate \$50,000 from the 2011 income tax capital improvement fund to support efforts to stabilize the structural integrity of the Gasholder building.

Her motion further suggested future councils endeavor to provide a 25 percent match to dollars raised by fundraising efforts, up to \$50,000 per year in the 2012, 2013, and 2014 budgets. The motion passed unanimously.

On Saturday, members of the implementation team hosted a community update at the site of the Gasholder building on South Main Street. Colaso and team leader George Abran



Photo by Kathleen Willow

Assistant city manager Darlene Colaso introduces speakers and guests during an update at the Gasholder structure on Saturday.

hosted the event which included music, refreshments and a look inside the building. The city also awarded pinques to the Clark family which owned, and then donated, the property

on which the Gasholder is built to the city, the Oberlin Heritage Center, and resident Tussy Mealy for supporting the project to preserve the structure.