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Government money unavailable to help Rossville rebuild

ROSSVILLE—Hopes that free money might be available to rebuild business destroyed in a Feb. 27 fire went up in smoke Tuesday as those affected by the fire heard from representatives of state financial and emergency agencies.

Nearly 30 people were at the village office to hear that while low-interest loans may be available, neither the state nor federal government will give money to help those who lost their businesses and homes in the 100 block of South Chicago St.

"The state is not going to come in - and is in no position - to come in and give you a blank check," said State Rep. Bill Black.

Although Black no longer represents this area, he attended Monday's meeting, along with area Rep. Shane Cultra, State Sen. Dan Rutherford and a representative of U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson.

Courts rulings ban governments from giving money to rebuild private property, said Black, who represented the area when a fire damaged the Sheldon business district in 1996. Black and others helped that village with low-interest loans that were used to build a community center. "I don't want to give you false hopes," Black said. "It took a long time in Sheldon and it will take a long time here."

Loans with interest at less than the market rate are expected to be available from the Illinois Treasurer's Office, coordinated by the Department of Economic Opportunity and the Illinois Finance Authority. Also, the Small Business Administration may have low-interest loans, as well.

Just as there is little financial help available, Rossville may not get much help in cleaning up the rubble.

Black suggested the village request a waiver on tipping fees from landfills that accept the rubble.

All local landfills are owned by Allied Waste, headquartered in Arizona, he said.

It will be some while before the remains of the buildings are gone. Debris cannot be removed until an asbestos assessment is completed. That process is expected to begin Wednesday, said Mayor Terry Prillaman.

Jerry Cearlock of the Illinois Department of Transportation said IDOT could help with removing debris

Will business owners rebuild?

ROSSVILLE—Low-interest loans and proceeds from insurance can provide money for the owners of businesses destroyed by the Feb. 27 fire to rebuild but will they?

The answer is, that depends on who they are.

Nancy Dickson, who owned three of the five buildings destroyed is seriously considering rebuilding. "I'm going to look into it," said Dickson, who owned Heritage House since 1995 and Heritage Hall and Old Country Store for about a year.

At Tuesday's meeting between business owners and representatives of financial and emergency agencies, Dickson wanted information not only about low-interest loans but also about help with architectural design and whether the Illinois Department of Transportation has plans to expand Rt. 1.

On the flip side is Naomi Freeman, owner of Freeman's Folly. Her answer to rebuilding is "probably not."

"I don't see how I can," Freeman said after Tuesday's meeting. It will take to remove the debris, then coordinate with others to rebuild and in the meantime, Freeman, an antiques dealer, doesn't have a store.

An old Irish Blessing:

*May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind always
be at your back. May the sunshine warm upon your
face, the rain fall soft upon your fields and,
until we meet again, may God hold you
in the palm of his hand*

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