

# Bid to save Will County Courthouse gets boost from Joliet commission

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Bob Okon

## Latest move one of many to be made before fate of building decided

By [Bob Okon](#)



The old Will County Courthouse sits vacant in downtown Joliet on June 7, 2022. (Alex Ortiz)

August 25, 2023 at 12:00 pm CDT

A [Joliet](#) commission has recommended landmark status for the old [Will County](#) Courthouse, the latest in a series of moves made at local, state and federal levels of government that eventually will determine whether the building stands or falls.

The Joliet Historic Preservation Commission on Wednesday voted 7-0 with one member abstaining [to give local landmark status](#) to the courthouse, which the county may or may not want to tear down.

The [Will County Board](#) is in the process of possibly reconsidering a 2019 decision to demolish the building, which was built in 1969.

Meanwhile, a decision in May by the U.S. Department of the Interior to place the building on the National Register of Historic Places could buy more time for the building by creating more regulatory red tape to stand in the way of bulldozers.

Calling time “the building’s best friend,” Historic Preservation Commission member Quinn Adamowski said he believes a state review will be triggered because of the likely need for EPA permits before demolition can proceed.



Quinn Adamowski, Landmarks Illinois Regional Advocacy Manager and a member of the Joliet Historic Preservation Commission, has been a leading advocate for keeping the old courthouse building. (Gary Middendorf – gmiddendorf@shawmedia/Gary Middendorf)

Here’s a look at what’s happening in the saga over the future of the courthouse building.

## City of Joliet

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Even local landmark status would not in itself stop the courthouse from being demolished. But it would require a review by the Historic Preservation Commission before any changes, including demolition, could be made to the building exterior.

The commission’s vote does not give the building local landmark status but sends it to the Joliet City Council for a final decision.

The council is not seen as favorable. But commission members are hoping to persuade them, pointing to a series of public hearings they have held since May at which there has been only one opponent to landmark status.

Adamowski said he hopes the council also considers what the Chicago Street gateway to the city will look like to visitors driving in from Interstate 80 if the courthouse is demolished.

“You’re going to be welcomed by two expansive empty lots,” he said.

The City Council is scheduled to vote on the landmark status Sept. 19.



The old Will County Courthouse sits vacant in downtown Joliet on June 7, 2022. (Alex Ortiz)

## The county executive

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Will County Executive Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant and her office brought the only objections to landmark status to the commission.

Bertino-Tarrant is preparing to start tearing down the building as early as later this year, pointing to a 2019 County Board vote that was unanimous in approving demolition.

The county has eight bids for demolition and \$2.5 million in this year’s budget to pay for it.

Without any firm decision to stop demolition, Bertino-Tarrant said she is moving ahead with the process that would lead to a county board vote on a demolition contractor.

## The County Board

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The County Board, which has seen a big change in its makeup since 2019, is taking a new look at demolition.

The board last week voted 10-9 to send a proposal to study redevelopment possibilities to its Executive Committee. Whether anything comes of that may be settled at the next Executive Committee meeting in September.

Hudson Hollister, co-chairman of the Courthouse Preservation Coalition, took heart from last week's County Board vote even though it did not reverse the 2019 demolition vote.



Hudson Hollister, co-founder of the Courthouse Preservation Partnership, speaks to the Will County Board last week in support of a study for redevelopment options for the old Will County Courthouse. (Gary Middendorf – [gmiddendorf@shawmedia.com](mailto:gmiddendorf@shawmedia.com)/Gary Middendorf)

“What it does mean is we have 10 County Board members who have voted for more study before demolition,” Hollister said.

## State government

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Preservation advocates also believe that getting the courthouse on the National Register of Historic Places means a state historical review of demolition will kick in.

“At the state level, there is a regulatory review that takes place because it’s a national resource,” Adamowski said. “That happens if state money is needed or if there is a state permit.”

Adamowski said he believes the county will need a state EPA permit before demolition can begin.

Again, state review would not necessarily stop demolition, Adamowski said. But it could buy the building more time.