

No clear signal on saving tower

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WALDWICK

NJ

Transit has offered \$5,000 to help relocate a century-old railroad signal tower and spare it from demolition, but the Waldwick Historical Society says it may have to refuse the offer.

If moved from its present location — 20 feet from the tracks at the end of Bohnert Place — the tower would lose its chance of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places, said Kay Williams, the society's president.

"The railroad yard is definitely Waldwick," said John Huska, a society member and 25-year resident. The signal tower is the only remaining building of a once busy signal and switching yard, he said.

The two-story, Queen Anne-style tower, with patterned wood shingles, is in disrepair but retains much of its architectural charm. NJ Transit, which owns it, stationed signal operators there until May, when it computerized all signal and rail switching operations.

The transit authority had planned to level the tower in June, but extended the deadline to Dec. 31 after the historical society and borough council asked for time to develop a proposal that would save the tower. The historical society was instrumental in saving the borough's 101-year-old train depot from demolition 10 years ago.

In October, the society proposed that the signal tower stay at its original site but be turned

into a transportation museum for schoolchildren and other members of the public. Two weeks ago, the transit authority turned down the proposal but offered \$5,000 to help relocate the tower.

"We think the museum is a great reuse," said Rose Sheridan, an authority spokeswoman. "But our concern is safety.

"The signal tower is very close to the trains," she said. "We are quite nervous about having children that close to the trains."

The historical society's proposal to build a fence separating the tower from the tracks was not adequate assurance for the transit authority.

"Fences are climbed over and cut," said Lynn Drobbin, environmental and historical specialist for the authority. "It would just be opening up liability for the railroad."

Protecting fiber-optic telephone cables buried 16 feet north of the tower was also a factor in declining the society's proposal, said Ms. Sheridan. She said the transit authority is obligated to give AT&T unrestricted access to the cables.

The 50-member historical society is to meet at 7:30 tonight in the borough library to discuss the transit authority's relocation offer. The group then is to meet with authority officials Monday.

Mrs. Williams said it is important that the tower stay where it is. Relocation might prevent the tower from being included on the National Register of Historic Places, for which it is being considered, she said.



JOE GIARDELLI/THE RECORD

Kay Williams and John Huska of the Waldwick Historical Society looking over plans to save a century-old railroad signal tower.

The tower is listed on the state register of historic sites, but it could lose that status if moved, said Melissa Haines, assistant historic preservation officer for the Bergen County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs. She said the tower's listing in the state register is mainly a status symbol and does not protect it from demolition.

The historical society plans to lobby state and federal legis-

lators to keep the tower at its original location. Restoration costs are estimated at \$25,000, most of which the society plans to raise by applying for public grants and private and corporate donations.

"I think it builds pride," Mrs. Williams said of the tower. "It gives dimension to a town. The coming of the railroad is what really developed Waldwick as a town."