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Railyard Project Could Be Closer

■ *City Council to take up bill to help fund purchase of Barelás site*

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Journal Staff Writer

All the pieces could finally be falling into place to redevelop

the old Santa Fe railyard property, a development that would include the still-on-track Wheels Museum.

The City Council on Nov. 5 is to consider a bill that would put in place the remaining money needed, up to \$3 million, to buy the one-time locomotive repair shops site in Barelás and allow the city to exercise that option.

Alan Clark, executive director of the Wheels Museum, a long-proposed transportation museum, said in a recent interview that the museum has signed an agreement to buy the 27-acre site.

Museum officials earlier this year acknowledged they were in negotiations with the owners to buy the site.

The museum also has inked an agreement with the city.

"We have a memorandum of understanding with the city of Albuquerque that provides for the city to purchase the railyard property for the development of Wheels Museum and any other appropriate purpose," Clark said.

The purchase price is about

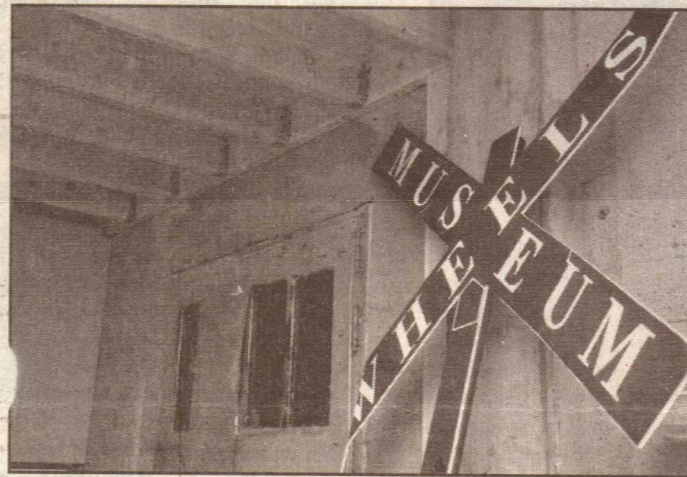
\$8.5 million, not including closing costs. The city has about \$6.57 million, including money from grants, general funds and reserves that can be used to acquire the property, according to the bill sponsored by City Councilor Isaac Benton.

The measure would allow up to \$3 million in "workforce housing trust fund" money to

be used — along with the already available money — to acquire the property.

"For the short term, we're going to guarantee the purchase with that money," Benton said. "But that's with the proviso that at least 30 affordable housing units will be built on

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JOURNAL FILE

A sign for the Wheels Museum is one of the pieces that might be displayed once the city acquires Santa Fe railyard property and develops it for the long-planned local attraction.

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the site. That's a minimum."

While the memorandum of understanding commits to a transportation museum at the site, the overall development of the property has yet to be determined.

"Long-term, the plan is, once we have the site under control, we would do an economic study of the site," Benton said.

The economic study would be undertaken by the nationally known Urban Land Institute.

Thereafter, the city would seek a master developer through a request for proposals or similar process, Benton said.

"That master developer ... would work with the city to develop a master site development plan, but the city would retain control of the planning process," the councilor said.

Going into the project, the land institute has been told that there are a few con-

straints — that the Wheels Museum would be located there, that any housing would be mixed-income housing and that any economic development would have to complement the Barelás and South Fourth Street commercial areas.

Mayor Martin Chávez likened the use of a private-sector master developer to the way the old Albuquerque High School was redeveloped.

"This is monumental for the future of Albuquerque," Chávez said about acquiring the railyard land and moving forward with redevelopment.

"We are investing in our past and, of course, these (railyard repair shop buildings) were very much in danger of being torn down."

Clark said the Wheels Museum could operate under a similar concept as the Explora science center, in that the city owns the property, but the museum is run by a private nonprofit.