

Arboretum may get horse sculpture

City commissioners will decide in Tuesday's meeting

Barrett Newkirk • *The Enquirer* • October 4, 2010

Battle Creek's bronze horse could soon be put out to greener pastures.

The horse sculpture that stood in a downtown pedestrian plaza for more than 24 years will likely get a new home in the Leila Arboretum.

City commissioners are set to vote on the relocation Tuesday.

Workers removed the 1,500-pound statue from its long-time spot along Michigan Avenue on Sept. 23 to make way for a driveway through the plaza commonly called Horse Park.

Vice Mayor Chris Simmons said some people had suggested keeping the horse downtown. At least one downtown business owner was interested in it, he said, and others had suggested moving it to the Art Center of Battle Creek.

But Simmons said the arboretum seemed to be the best choice.

"The city owns the sculpture, and it needs to remain on city-owned property," he said. "It doesn't really fit in downtown with the whole downtown transformation."

The sculpture, officially titled "The Great American Horse," was donated to the city in 1986 by an insurance company that left Battle Creek nine months after unveiling the gift.

The city owns the Leila Arboretum, but it is mostly run by the nonprofit Leila Arboretum Society.

Commissioners will also vote Tuesday on giving the society \$50,000 for park maintenance and educational programs approved during budget talks earlier this year.

Brett Myers, the society's executive director, said Friday he'd expressed interest in the sculpture but wasn't aware of the city's plans.

"We think it would add great value to the visitor experience," he said. "We are an arts and culture institution, and we would love to have it."

The arboretum's master plan includes an outdoor amphitheater, he said, and one idea for the sculpture is to place it atop a ridge near that proposed site.

He said another sculpture at the arboretum, the large steel "Circa," had also been downtown at one time.

A wooden pergola in Horse Park was also going to the arboretum, but Myers said the wood was in such poor condition that he didn't think it could be rebuilt.

Barrett Newkirk can be reached at 966-0692 or bnewkirk@gannett.com.