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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP)—The Missouri Baptist Building is once again on the market, after voters gave a resounding “no” to a sales tax increase that would have funded a county government’s purchase of the property.

Voters in Cole County turned down the proposal, which would have raised funds for a new county criminal-justice complex in downtown Jefferson City, by an almost 3-to-1 margin. In August, representatives of the county and the Missouri Baptist Convention inked a \$2.75 million contingency contract for the sale of the building, which has served as headquarters for the convention’s ministry staff since 1970.

The county also intended to purchase several other properties in the block on which the building stands. The structures would have been demolished to make way for the new jail, office and courtroom facility.

The deal for the 77-year-old building—which was the historic Missouri

Hotel before the convention purchased it and remodeled it extensively—was contingent on two conditions being met: voter approval of a half-cent sales tax and agreements with other property owners on the block.

The vote nullified the contract, and the Missouri convention is looking for a new buyer.

“We will be entertaining other possible buyers and contracts,” Executive Director David Clippard, said. “At this moment in time, we have no other buyers identified.

“The MBC is under no pressure, nor does it have any deadlines, to sell the Baptist Building,” Clippard continued. “It has served Missouri Baptists well. But we will continue to explore its sale and replacement in an effort to lower overall operations costs and thereby channel more dollars into missions, church planting and helping our churches fulfill their Great Commission mandate of Acts 1:8.”

On Oct. 11, Clippard fired Bob Baysinger, then the managing editor of the convention’s recently established newspaper, for a story he published related to the deal. Baysinger had reported the contract on the Pathway’s website Aug. 27. Clippard reportedly accused Baysinger of jeopardizing the deal by publicizing it.

In a related story, a local attorney filed a complaint with the state’s attorney general against the Cole County Commission for violating the state’s so-called “Sunshine Law” with the MBC arrangement. Since the commission voted to authorize the contract but did not publicize it within three days of the vote, both the action and the contract should be declared void, Clyde Angle said.

In addition to convention offices, the Baptist Building houses the Missouri Baptist Foundation and the Missouri Baptist Credit Union.

Messengers to the 2003 MBC annual meeting authorized the MBC Executive Board to pursue the possible sale of the building. At that meeting, they approved a motion by David Krueger, pastor of First Baptist Church in Linn, for the Executive Board to appoint a committee to investigate opportunities for selling the building.

At the same meeting, messengers also approved using the building as collateral for a \$1 million line of credit through Exchange National Bank in Jefferson City. The money established the convention's Agency Restoration Fund to pay fees incurred for its ongoing legal action against five MBC-related institutions.

In 2000, trustees of the MBC-affiliated retirement-home system, called The Baptist Home, voted to begin electing their own successors rather than continuing to allow the convention to do so. The trustees of Missouri Baptist University in St. Louis; Windermere Baptist Conference Center at the Lake of the Ozarks; the Missouri Baptist Foundation and the convention's former official newspaper, Word & Way, took similar actions in 2001.

The convention then withdrew funding from the agencies and initiated legal action to re-gain control of their trustee-nominating process. It also established the Pathway, and forced Word & Way to vacate its offices in the Baptist Building.

Vicki Brown is a reporter for Word & Way.

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