

RENOVATING Fortuna Villa to make it usable could take tens of millions of dollars and up to four years, a local expert has warned.

With the army set to soon vacate the historic building, the City of Greater Bendigo council has begun thinking about what could be done with the iconic former home of mining magnate George Lansell.

Some community groups want to create an artists retreat at the Golden Square site, and others want it used in the health field.

Whatever the result, the consensus is it should stay in the hands of the community.

However, that could be an expensive solution according to Royal Australian Institute of Architects life fellow and Bendigo architect Dennis Carter.

Mr Carter said the community needed to be made aware of the extent of the work needed to make the building usable again.

## Tell us your thoughts

Let us know what you think should be done with Fortuna Villa when the army moves out.

### Email

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Write to PO Box 324, Bendigo, 3552.

"The expense would be horrific," he said.

"The requirements for restoring it for re-use from a heritage viewpoint alone are significant.

"Above that you would have ongoing and recurrent costs."

Mr Carter said the restoration job alone would cost a minimum of \$15 million.

"That amount actually wouldn't go far renovating it," he said.

"Then you would need a couple of million a year to maintain it.

"To meet the current building and workplace health and safety requirements would be an extraordinary expense.

"I think the idea of an arts centre is probably romantic and fanciful and totally unrealistic."

However, Mr Carter said nothing was impossible and the historic complex was worth fighting for.

"It is one of the most significant complexes in Australia," he said.

"It is probably just as significant as Werribee park as a property.

"Nobody would like to see it rot."

Mr Carter said the community and the council should be patient so any outcome was the right one.

"I reckon it would take three or four years," he said.

"It would require a lot of studies and a couple of million easy on consultant's fees to examine prospects alone, even before it is purchased," he said.

"You would need a cast of thousands of experts to do it and many years' work.

"Nothing is too hard. Anything is achievable. You just can't do something this grand half baked."