

Dolton Moves to Buy Childhood Home of Pope Leo XIV

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The village of Dolton, Illinois, is taking steps to purchase the childhood home of Pope Leo XIV, the first American ever elected pope. On Tuesday night, the Dolton Village Board voted unanimously to acquire the modest two-story house on East 142nd Place, about 20 miles south of Chicago.

Since Cardinal Robert Prevost was elected in May, the home has drawn growing crowds of visitors eager to see where his life began. Local officials believe preserving the house as a

historical site could bring new economic opportunities and positive attention to the community.

“Moments like this don’t come around twice,” said Dolton Mayor Jason House during the meeting. “We can honor this legacy ourselves or watch an investor take it over.”

Born in Chicago in 1955, Prevost grew up in Dolton before earning a mathematics degree at Villanova University and studying theology in Chicago. He spent more than 20 years as a missionary in Peru, where he became a bishop and a naturalized citizen. His election shocked many and was called “one of the most significant moments in our city’s history” by Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson.

Since then, Dolton has seen steady traffic from tourists, news crews, and pilgrims. Officials say turning the house into a museum or visitor center could help secure state and federal grants while attracting visitors and businesses.

However, some residents worry the village is taking on too much at once.

“Buying the pope’s house sounds nice,” said longtime resident Mary Avent, “but our streets are crumbling, and we don’t have a permanent police or fire chief. Are we ready for this?”

Trustee Edward Steave responded that these concerns are valid, but said the board believes Dolton can both maintain essential services and invest in its future.

Officials also pointed to other famous childhood homes, such as those of Michael Jackson and Martin Luther King Jr., which have brought long-term economic benefits to their communities.

The sale is expected to close within two weeks. For Dolton, owning the house is not only about preserving history but also about building pride and new opportunities for years to come.