

Friday, April 23, 2010

Beacon St. factory has admirers

By Nick Kotsopoulos TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF
nkotsopoulos@telegram.com

WORCESTER — A city councilor and Preservation Worcester have come out strongly against a developer's plan to raze a historic, vacant factory building in the Main South area to make way for multifamily housing.

District 4 Councilor Barbara G. Haller and Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, last night urged the Historical Commission not to act favorably on a request to waive the city's demolition delay ordinance for the three-story brick structure at 64 Beacon St.

The ordinance puts a 12-month delay on demolition of historic structures so there can be time to explore alternative uses for the buildings.

"This is a very fragile part of our city," Ms. Haller said. "The salvation of the (Beacon Street) area is in its architecture and we must take every step to preserve it. I promise to work as hard as I can during the one-year delay to make sure we come up with an appropriate reuse for it."

The former factory building, built between 1870 and 1878, is listed on the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System and the National Registers of Historic Places. It is one of the few remaining factory buildings in what was the Junction Shop Manufacturing District.

Ms. Packard said 64 Beacon St. is believed to be the oldest remaining factory building in the city, and it played an important role in the history of industry in Worcester.

"Because of its (historic) significance, we want to see this (building) restored through historic preservation and we hope that you do not waive the demolition delay ordinance," Ms. Packard said.

The building was occupied by Glasgo Thread Works during the 1880s and by the Worcester Corset Co. during the 1890s, according to Joel Fontane, director of the city's Planning and Regulatory Services Division. Through later mergers, the building complex became part of the Junction Shop Manufacturing Co., which was one of the largest mill buildings in the city at the time of its construction.

The property is owned by Beacon Herman LLC, headed by Vaios Theodorakos. The developer received permission from the city in 2004 to convert 64 and 79 Beacon St., two vacant industrial buildings, into 181 multifamily dwelling units. But the project never got off the ground, even though the Planning Board extended its approval for it in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Also, the building that stood at 79 Beacon St. was razed two years ago under an emergency demolition order issued by the city manager.

In petitioning the Historical Commission for a waiver to the one-year demolition delay ordinance, the developer indicated that 64 Beacon St. has been abandoned for many years and is in a state of disrepair. The structural deficiencies in the building require that it be demolished in order to revive the site through construction of multifamily housing, according to the petition.

But in a report to the Historical Commission, Mr. Fontane said the demolition would be detrimental to the city's architectural and historical resources.

"More specifically, the proposed demolition would permanently eliminate one of the best remaining examples of 19th century industrial buildings in the city," Mr. Fontane wrote. "As demonstrated by the petitioners and approved by the Planning Board, this building complex can be restored and converted into a 181-dwelling unit multifamily residential use. I respectfully recommend denial of the building demolition delay waiver."

At the request of the petitioner, the Historical Commission postponed action on the request until May 13.