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Clock Tower, turret rejected for tax breaks

CLOCK TOWER, TURRET REJECTED FOR TAX BREAKS



Preservation Worcester officials are concerned about the future of the Clock Tower building at Worcester State Hospital because of a recent ruling that such structures do not qualify for federal historic tax credits. (T&G Staff/TOM RETTIG)

By Bronislaus B. Kush TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF



The Odd Fellows Home, 40 Randolph Road. (T&G Staff/TOM RETTIG)



Our Lady of Fatima Church, 43 Belmont St. (T&G Staff/TOM RETTIG)



The Junction Shops, 64 Beacon St. (T&G Staff Photos/TOM RETTIG)

Preservation Worcester endangered properties

- The Clock Tower
- Our Lady of Fatima Church
43 Belmont St.
- The Junction Shops, 64 Beacon St.
- The Odd Fellows Home, 40 Randolph Rd.
- Bramble Hill, 757 Salisbury St.
- Bais Hatveloh Mikvah (Jewish Bath House), 4 Hurstley St.
- The Chase House, 114 Austin St.
- The Mellen House, 41 to 43 Queen St.
- Bowker House, 3 Harvard Place



WORCESTER — Over the past 17 years, Preservation Worcester has published an annual list of city landmarks facing demolition and the Clock Tower building at Worcester State Hospital has been on the register seven times.

Preservationists fear, however, that this year's listing may be the last for the historic structure, which stands 250 feet above Lake Quinsigamond, dominating the landscape that overlooks Route 9.

Their tireless efforts to save the stone tower — along with the Hooper Turret, a freestanding circular building that sits nearby — may all have been for naught after the U.S. Park Service ruled recently that the structures do not qualify for federal historic tax credits.

Without those credits, preservationists said there's little chance a developer would be interested in retro-fitting those properties for other uses. Developers sell the credits to investors to raise capital and equity in their projects.

The concern of preservationists has also been exacerbated by the departure of David Perini as director of the Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management.

Preservation Worcester officials said Mr. Perini went out of his way to try to incorporate the Clock Tower and the Hooper Turret into the plans to build a new \$302 million psychiatric facility on the grounds of the old state hospital.

“Given what's recently happened, it's going to be very difficult to save these structures,” said Deborah Packard, Preservation Worcester's executive director. “With the loss of the credits, my instinct tells me the state is now going to go in another direction. But we're going to continue our efforts and that's why we're including these buildings on this year's list.”

Preservation Worcester officials are trying to rally support through Facebook. About 150 individuals have pledged their support through that venue.

Worcester State Hospital, originally known as the Worcester State Lunatic Hospital, was built between 1874 and 1877 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

With the exception of the tower and the turret, the complex was demolished to make way for the new hospital, which is scheduled to open next year.

In rejecting the eligibility of the structures for the tax credits, Roger G. Reed, the historian of the National Register of Historic Places, said that there's not much left of the original facility and that "the alterations" at the site no longer convey "the sense of a historic environment."

"Due to the large extent of demolition, the district (the old hospital complex), and, therefore its individual components, no longer retains architectural integrity as originally listed," said Mr. Reed, in a letter to state officials.

Ms. Packard said Mr. Reed struggled with his decision and officials said U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Worcester, lobbied on behalf of the properties.

Ms. Packard said she believes the two buildings could still be incorporated in some way with the nearby biotech park or the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

James W. Igoe, the president of Preservation Massachusetts, agreed that it would be difficult to develop the properties without the credits. He said trying to retrofit any historic structure is difficult anyway, given today's bad economy.

Mr. Igoe, who served at one time as Preservation Worcester's executive director, and who put the Clock Tower on Preservation Worcester's first most endangered list, said he believes that it would cost at least \$25 million to get the structures in shape.

Besides the Worcester State Hospital buildings, Preservation Worcester officials are also seriously concerned about three other structures on the register — the former Our Lady of Fatima Church on Belmont Street, The Junction Shops on Beacon Street and the Odd Fellows Home on Randolph Road.

The Worcester Historical Commission had ordered that the planned demolition of those three structures by developers be delayed for a year. Those orders expire this spring.

The other properties on the list are: Bais Hatveloh Mikvah (the Jewish Bath House), 4 Huntley St.; Bramble Hill (the former Higgins mansion), 757 Salisbury St.; the Charles H. Bowker House, 3 Harvard Place; the Henry and Walter L. Mellen Double House and carriage house, 41 to 43 Queen St., and the Rufus H. Chase House, 114 Austin St.

About 40 properties were nominated for the list.