

Tuesday, January 10, 2012

Clock tower a piece of city's history

Letter to the Editor

The seemingly timeless stone clock tower at Worcester State Hospital soars high above Worcester's eastern hills, overlooking Lake Quinsigamond. Visible for miles around, it is an exceptional architectural landmark and a symbol of the outstanding role that Worcester has played in the history of the care of the mentally ill in the United States. Yet, this commanding, inspiring element of the city's landscape will likely be demolished this spring. Basing its decision entirely upon the bottom line, the commonwealth of Massachusetts has proposed to demolish this architecturally and historically significant landmark building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and put up a replica of the tower alone as an obelisk-like monument.

When deciding on the future of a building that gives meaning to our lives as we pass it day by day, the bottom line should not be the only consideration. When determining the future of a building of great historical significance and high architectural merit, we must take a longer view. The immediate savings achieved by demolition must be balanced by consideration of the long-term loss of an irreplaceable landmark.

The commonwealth's recent abrupt decision to demolish the clock tower took supporters by surprise and has left them little time to find alternatives. I urge those who support the preservation of the original clock tower to demand that the state delay its proposed demolition to give local groups time to find options for its preservation.

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