

## **Worcester Telegram & Gazette – Letter to the Editor**

**Tuesday, November 22, 2011**

Answering the alarm  
Partnership to preserve Briggs' gem

Just in time, a public-private partnership is rushing to the rescue of one of Worcester's architectural gems, the 1925 Fire Alarm and Telegraph Building at 230 Park Ave. The City Council this evening will consider an update that outlines plans by Spencer Savings Bank, Preservation Worcester, and the city itself to undertake a comprehensive and faithful restoration.

This plan is a smart one that takes into full account Worcester's past, present and future, including the needs of the surrounding parkland, commercial possibilities, and respect for one of the city's most noted architects. It deserves the full support of city officials and the public.

Spencer Savings Bank, which is bearing the bulk of the multimillion-dollar restoration costs, will develop a retail banking office on the second floor, while Preservation Worcester will rent the first-floor space, which will include community meeting space and a catering kitchen. Worcester foundations are contributing \$275,000 toward the project, and the city \$100,000 for remediation of existing hazards.

The agreement will help raise awareness about and improve access to the trails in the wooded areas of Newton Hill that constitute the bulk of Elm Park.

The building was designed by noted Worcester architect Lucius W. Briggs, whose projects include the Worcester Memorial Auditorium and dozens of area homes, businesses, libraries and other prominent structures, in the U.S. and overseas. Mr. Briggs' work ranged from designing Norton Company's plant in Germany to laying out the lettering on the Battle Monument at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

But it was the humble Fire Alarm and Telegraph building — long the city's nerve center when disaster struck — that was the architect's favorite. Following his death in 1940, colleagues recalled that Mr. Briggs had labored over the minutest details of the project, and would proudly exhibit it to his colleagues whenever they visited Worcester.

Of course, it takes nothing but time and neglect to undo the richest architectural legacy, and the building's condition in recent years has grown to nothing short of alarming. Since 2001, it has regularly appeared on Preservation Worcester's list of the city's 10 most endangered properties. Time to rescue it from oblivion was fast running out.

Spencer Savings Bank, Preservation Worcester and the city itself have now answered that call.