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OK sought to file bill
Restoring fire alarm building

By Nick Kotsopoulos TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WORCESTER — City Manager Michael V. O'Brien is seeking authorization from the City Council to file special legislation needed to restore and redevelopment the historic Fire Alarm & Telegraph Building in Elm Park by a private developer.

Mr. O'Brien said the special legislation, which goes before the council tonight will enable the city to dispose of the building and lease the grounds of the Fire Alarm & Telegraph property, at 230 Park Ave.

The plan is to transfer at no cost the city-owned 6,735-square-foot, two-story brick building to Spencer Savings Bank, which would restore it while meeting all historic standards.

The city also would lease for 70 years, with options, up to 3 acres of parkland needed for the construction of a parking lot, curb cuts and accessibility considerations.

Last month, Mr. O'Brien informed the council that the city had reached agreement with Spencer Savings Bank and Preservation Worcester for the vacant and badly deteriorating Fire Alarm and Telegraph Building.

Spencer Savings would establish a retail banking office on the building's second floor.

Preservation Worcester would lease most of the first floor, which would contain community space and related amenities. Preservation Worcester would manage the spaces in the building for community use.

Mr. O'Brien said Spencer Savings will finance the entire building rehabilitation except for the first-floor community space, for which local foundations will contribute \$275,000. Sources close to the negotiations indicated the historic renovations and site work would cost approximately \$3.5 million.

Because public parkland is involved, the city has to receive authorization from the Legislature through a home-rule bill to be able to lease the building to Spencer Savings and have the building used for commercial purposes.

The Fire Alarm building, constructed in 1925, is on the National Register of Historic Places and has been identified by Preservation Worcester as one of the city's "Most Endangered Structures." It once served as the central relay station for the city's fire alarm system. After the Fire Department abandoned its use of the building, the School Department stored maintenance equipment there. Also, the city stored many records from the former City Hospital on the building's upper floor.

In addition to dealing with issues associated with the Fire Alarm and Telegraph Building, Mr. O'Brien said, the special legislation he wants to file will:

- Provide for the reversion of the Doherty Memorial High School property back to Elm Park if the city and Worcester public schools ever determine that the site is no longer required for public school purposes. Doherty High was built in the mid-1960s and was once part of Elm Park.
- Allow for the necessary easements and leases to construct and support a flagpole, with ancillary telecommunications technology, at the summit of Newton Hill, which is in Elm Park.
- Provide for the installation of a bus stop shelter within Green Hill Park as part of the Belmont Street Improvement Project.
- Confirm the change in use of parts of Green Hill Park as was necessary for the installation, maintenance, and replacement of water supply tanks and mains, and public safety radio transmission towers now in the park. The legislation would allow for easements and leases to support telecommunications technology within Green Hill Park.

“It is my intention, with the full cooperation and partnership of the Greater Worcester Land Trust and the support of the Green Hill Park Coalition, to designate approximately 13 acres of open space land acquired this summer from the Sisters of Providence abutting Green Hill Park land as replacement land for what had to be taken in the park,” Mr. O'Brien said.