

**Friday, January 6, 2012**

Saving time

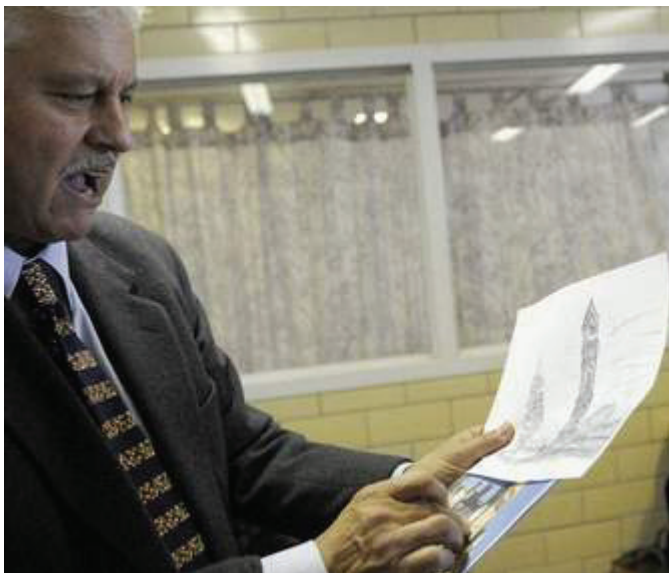
Compromise plan receives a lukewarm response

**CLOCK TOWER REPLICA EYED FOR HOSPITAL**



The clock tower building as it appears today

**By Lee Hammel TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF**



WSH Projects Manager Charles Willse holds drawings of the clock tower. (T&G Staff Photos/JIM COLLINS)

**WORCESTER** — State officials yesterday presented a compromise for saving the Clock Tower at Worcester State Hospital that was met with mixed emotions by local preservationists.

The state Division of Capital Asset Management proposed taking down the 114-foot-high Clock Tower and rebuilding it on the site. Charles Willse, DCAM project manager, said that would be cheaper and safer than trying to preserve the crumbling tower, which is only 115 feet away from The Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital under construction on the Worcester State Hospital campus.

Mr. Willse gave a preliminary cost estimate of \$7 million to \$8 million for demolition and using the stones of the old building to rebuild it using new bricks, slate and other materials. Mr. Willse promised it would be “an exact replica.”

The re-erected building would not permit occupancy, although it would allow access for maintenance and, possibly, a bell that is in the tower, he said. Joseph P. McEvoy, state building inspector, called the proposal “a hollow obelisk.”

Members of Preservation Worcester had already presented their own compromise. They agreed to give up on the hope of saving the old central administration building of which the Clock Tower is a part, providing that the Clock Tower were saved.

After the meeting, Deborah Packard, Preservation Worcester executive director, said, “I think we've made progress.” Only three weeks ago, the state filed an environment notification saying it planned to level the Clock Tower.

While she called it a tragedy to lose any more of the few buildings remaining of the state hospital built 135 years ago, she said, “I was pleased with the meeting.”

Yesterday's meeting was part of the state's environmental approval process. There is a deadline of Jan. 10 for public comments to the secretary of environmental affairs (which can be emailed to [deirdre.buckley@state.ma.us](mailto:deirdre.buckley@state.ma.us)). That office will decide whether to require more information before the project can go forward.

Ms. Packard did not say what the cost of Preservation Worcester's proposal would be. She said it is the state's responsibility to examine the alternatives to demolishing a historic structure, and she hopes DCAM will come up with the price for preserving the Clock Tower as it is rather than demolishing and reassembling it.

However, with the opening of the new state hospital, the state building commissioner expressed concern about holding up the hospital's occupancy if action is not taken quickly on demolition. Mr. Willse said there is 6 inches of pigeon guano on the Clock Tower floor and asbestos in the structure.

Barbara Leadholm, outgoing commissioner of the Department of Mental Health, said the expectation is that employees will begin training at The Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital in March or April and it will open for patient occupancy in July.

Susan M Ceccacci, education director for Preservation Worcester, said that the state building inspector determined that the hospital could not open with the Clock Tower in its present

condition. Loosened slates are falling off the tower's roof, and the prevailing wind blows from the tower toward the new hospital.

Asked about that after the meeting, Mr. McEvoy said comment should come from officials at the state Department of Public Safety, who could not be reached late yesterday afternoon.

Ms. Ceccacci, an architectural historian, said that the re-erected Clock Tower would be a monument, but it would not be historical.

But Dr. Leonard Morse, a Preservation Worcester member and retired city health commissioner, said he is encouraged that after a contentious meeting Nov. 9, it appears the state is on the same page with preservationists.

Mr. Willse acknowledged there are "issues" to be worked out with the state's new proposal.

He said that even Preservation Worcester's proposal would result in two-thirds of the tower being new construction.

Mr. Willse said it would cost more than \$10 million to stabilize the building as it is, and it still would not be usable. He said the state's commitment to spend \$7 million for a historic, but unusable, building is unprecedented.

Tax credits are not available to help offset the cost of developing the property, state officials said.

Without them, their research shows the property, which would cost \$35 million to ready for occupancy, is not commercially viable.

Diane Witt, a Worcester resident, said state officials did not put the property on the market, assuring that it could not be sold. In any event, the state has not declared the property to be surplus, and thus available to be put on the market.