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Time running out for clock tower
State files the papers for demolition

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State officials are seeking approval to demolish the historic Worcester State Hospital Clock Tower building.

(T&G Staff/CHRISTINE PETERSON)

WORCESTER — State officials are seeking approval to demolish the historic Worcester State Hospital Clock Tower building, but local preservationists hope a compromise can be brokered to save some of the structure.

The Division of Capital Asset Management and the state Department of Mental Health this month filed paperwork with state environmental officials and the Massachusetts Historical Commission to tear down the five-story, 52,000-square-foot building off Belmont Street after

concluding that reusing the structure is “not financially feasible.”

The state’s Executive Office of Environmental Affairs will conduct a site visit at 2:30 p.m. Jan. 5 in Room 5C of the Bryan Building, 305 Belmont St. Written comments on the demolition request are due Jan. 10.

The state plans to open a \$302 million psychiatric hospital next summer about 115 feet northeast of the Clock Tower on 26 acres of the former Worcester State Hospital grounds. Worcester State Hospital was the first state-owned hospital in the country to treat mental illness.

The state had been working with Preservation Worcester and the Worcester Historical Commission investigating redevelopment efforts but those plans were dealt a blow this year when the National Park Service ruled that the Clock Tower, which was listed in 1980 on the National Register of Historic Places, did not qualify for federal tax credits.

Park Service officials said the Clock Tower, which was damaged in a 1991 fire, no longer retained architectural integrity. Developers sell tax credits to investors to raise equity and capital in their projects.

Officials with the state Department of Mental Health could not be reached for comment yesterday. The building’s granite and brick façade, clock tower, turret, colonnades and balustrades, built in the 1870s, made it a prime example of Victorian-Gothic architecture. In recent years, it has been listed on Preservation Worcester’s Endangered Structures list.

Deborah S. Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, said she hopes an agreement can be reached to at least preserve the Clock Tower portion of the building. Her organization had hoped to save the entire building but a fitting memorial would also be if the thin, tower portion, which overlooks Lake Quinsigamond, could be saved from the wrecking ball

“It would end up being a long needle,” she said. “It’s a separate substructure and could be saved.”

Fixing the tower might cost an extra \$1 million to \$1.5 million and several organizations have expressed interest, she said. The state plans to spend \$3 million to tear down the building, she said.

“We will still fight for the clock tower,” she said yesterday. “We still would love to see the building remain but they’ve determined it’s too expensive.”