

Time ticks on preserving the past

Clock called endangered



The 10-foot-high Worcester Five Cents Savings clock. (T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN)

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Fire Alarm and Telegraph Building at 224 Park Ave.



WORCESTER — For years, Preservation Worcester has placed an assortment of historic homes and buildings on its annual list of endangered landmarks.

The nonprofit has also included aging statues, rusting memorials, barns, carriage houses, an art deco gasoline station, and even the notorious Paris Cinema adult entertainment complex to its register of famous places and things that face demolition because of neglect or abandonment.

But this year's list has an unorthodox selection — a timepiece.

The 10-foot-high Worcester Five Cents Savings clock, which sits in front of 50 Front St. and opposite Worcester Common, is one of 11 "structures" chosen for the 2006 most endangered list.

Deborah Packard, Preservation Worcester's executive director, said the clock was picked because it has become a significant component of the streetscape around City Hall.

"The clock was nominated by a Shrewsbury man with the thought that Preservation Worcester ought to try to save historic structures beyond buildings and houses," Ms. Packard said.

Preservation Worcester officials and administrators at City Hall contacted by the Telegram & Gazette said they are not sure who is supposed to maintain the device, which is situated prominently on a public sidewalk, near Commercial Street.

The clock's faces have not provided passers-by with the correct time of day for years. The clock was originally on the west side of Main Street, across from Mechanics Hall, and it was modified and electrified in 1953.

The Worcester Five featured the clock in a number of promotional efforts over the years, including the "What Makes the Worcester Five Tick?" and the "It's Always Time to Save" print advertising campaigns.

It toppled over in 1977 when a motorist backed into it.

The clock, however, was righted and remained on Main Street until it was moved in 1985 a few blocks east to Front Street. It is unclear when ownership of the clock changed and who or what company owns it today.

But Worcester Five, which was incorporated in 1864 and which changed its name in 1971 to Consumer Savings Bank, was taken over by Bank of New England Corp. in 1986 as part of an \$81 million acquisition. Bank of New England was also subsequently gobbled up during the 1990s bank consolidation era.

Ms. Packard said inclusion of the bronze steel Worcester Five piece has prompted the organization to assess the status of other street clocks in Worcester.

This year's endangered list includes a number of repeaters, including the Fire Alarm and Telegraph Building at 224 Park Ave.

And a good chunk of the register is taken up by government-owned properties in the Lincoln Square area, including the Worcester Vocational High School complex, the former Lincoln Square Boys Club Building, the Worcester County Courthouse and the Worcester Memorial Auditorium.

With the exception of the state-owned courthouse, the rest of the properties are in the hands of the city.

Julie A. Jacobson, assistant city manager for neighborhood and economic development, said the city is set to seek out bids for a master plan to look at building uses in the Lincoln Square neighborhood.

She said the study will also include the Police Headquarters building at Belmont Street and Worcester

Center Boulevard, as well as non-governmental holdings, such as the churches on Court Hill.

Ms. Jacobson said the survey will be geared toward trying to determine how Lincoln Square, including parking and housing issues, can complement the nearby biotech Gateway Park project that is being developed by the Worcester Business Development Corp. and WPI.

Ms. Packard said Preservation Worcester received 20 nominations from individuals, developers, neighborhood groups and community development corporations.

She said Worcester State Hospital's Stone complex and the distinctive clock tower were placed on the list after receiving numerous nominations.

Preservationists are particularly concerned about the hospital property, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, because officials are trying to determine where to locate a new state hospital.

A commission has recommended that the new hospital be built in Worcester but the state Legislature has not given final approval.

Preservation Worcester has also placed the old barn at Hope Cemetery on the list.

The structure, which can be clearly seen from Webster Street, was dedicated in 1852 and is the last remaining original building on the property.

It was used to house horses and equipment.

Preservation Worcester officials said they are concerned because the building desperately needs exterior repairs.

Two residences are also on the register: the Jesse Moore House at 25 Catharine St., a Queen Anne mansion built in 1891, and the classical revival Frank Waite House at 251 Salisbury St.

The 2006 list contains the Adriatic Mill complex at 3-35 Armory St., another register repeat.