

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Time will tell

Clock's ticking on Preservation Worcester list

For years, passers-by have looked right past the 10-foot-tall thing which sits in front of 50 Front St.

It's been a long time since the ornate brown clock, which sports a name — "Worcester Five Cents Savings Bank" — that's been defunct for 25 years, has told anyone the time.

It's not clear who's responsible for the piece, which originally graced the west side of Main Street across from Mechanics Hall.

The clock's a classic case of unintended, undeserved descent into obscurity. It's a depressing sidewalk obstruction now that should be either done away with or, far better, restored to quiet glory on its little downtown spot.

Preservation Worcester hopes pointing the spotlight on it and other items will serve as a rescue call.

Every year the nonprofit compiles a no-holds-barred list of eyesores and problem spots in the city, presenting it as a kind of to-do wish list to officials and anyone else with the power and desire to tackle it.

These once-proud buildings, and occasionally objects, have historical and cultural significance but for whatever reason have been left behind. Preservation Worcester leads the worthy charge in suggesting they deserve to be brought back into the fold.

In the clock's case, it would seem a modest investment if the city could get it running again, assuming no one else makes a claim to it. That would be a nice feather in the cap of the streetscape improvements downtown.

This year's 11-point list also includes, in repeat appearances, the Fire Alarm and Telegraph building at 224 Park Ave., and the Adriatic Mill complex at 3-35 Armory St.

Also on the list of endangered landmarks are the Worcester State Hospital complex with its distinctive clock tower; and the old barn at Hope Cemetery, which at more than 150 years old is the last remaining original building on the property.

Two homes are on this year's list: the Jesse Moore House at 25 Catharine St., a Queen Anne mansion built in 1891; and, in a return appearance from last year, the Classical Revival Frank Waite House at 251 Salisbury St.

Lincoln Square properties that made the list are the Worcester Vocational High School

complex, the former Lincoln Square Boys Club building, the Worcester County Courthouse and the Worcester Memorial Auditorium, all city-owned except the state-owned courthouse. The courthouse and the auditorium were on last year's list as well.

Julie A. Jacobson, assistant city manager for neighborhood and economic development, said the city is set to seek bids concerning a master plan for the Lincoln Square area.

The plan will include, in addition to the buildings on the Preservation Worcester list, the police headquarters, churches on Court Hill and other buildings.

A Lincoln Square facelift would certainly serve the city well. The rest of the list, too, should spur action.

The city is a wealth of architecture and history; in the right hands, that wealth could again look the part.