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A new foundation for Worcester's historic Stearns Tavern



Deborah Packard, Preservation Worcester executive director, speaks Tuesday during the groundbreaking ceremony for the new location of the Stearns Tavern in Worcester. T&G Staff/Rick Cinclair

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WORCESTER - It's been part of the city's legacy for more than 200 years, and city officials and community and business representatives broke ground Tuesday to continue the legacy of the [Stearns Tavern](#) and the city's commitments to historic preservation, the special-needs community, and recreation.

"In 2015 we were under a demolition delay ... we had a challenge, but it worked," said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester. "I agree with the city manager, that as we look back on our careers, our jobs, what we have accomplished, this is going to be a highlight for all of us."

The Stearns Tavern dates to 1812 and is one of the oldest buildings in the city, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The vacant building, now at 651 Park Ave., narrowly avoided a date with the wrecking ball in 2014, with officials utilizing the demolition delay ordinance to give preservationists a year to save the structure.

But not only preservationists took up the cause.

Officials at the groundbreaking listed 27 private-sector partners (ranging from the engineering companies to a Buddhist temple) two nonprofits, multiple city and state officials and departments, four utility companies, and three unions who are collaborating to move the tavern to the location of the former Coes Knife Factory on Mill Street and on the shore of Coes Pond. Ms. Packard said the building will likely be moved within the next month.

The Seven Hills Foundation will use the building to provide job training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. An all-ages, universally-accessible playground will adjoin the tavern, and officials touted the project as part of a larger effort to restore the bath houses and beach at the pond.

"I hope that this will act as a unifying presence that brings together tremendous diversity in one place in Worcester," said David Jordan, president and chief executive officer of the Seven Hills Foundation. "That's the strength of Worcester: diversity coming together."

City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. said the project was particularly meaningful to him, as he grew up in the neighborhood and his father worked for a time at the former Coes Knife Factory. "This will be something we accomplished that we will be really proud of," Mr. Augustus said.