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# MCPHS University carving out parking downtown

**Tuesday**

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**WORCESTER** – One of the city’s biggest downtown landholders is seeking to carve out parking space for its newest program in an unusual way - by partially hollowing out a historic building.

MCPHS University is gutting its building at 34 Mechanic St. in hopes of creating about 30 ground-level parking spaces while preserving the second-story offices for future use, according to MCPHS President Charles F. Monahan.

The work would leave the building's façade unchanged and comes as MCPHS is wrapping up a \$15 million renovation of a nearby 34,000-square-foot building at 19 Norwich St. that houses the university's newest program, the New England School of Acupuncture.

Students in that program need to learn to treat patients, Mr. Monahan said, and those patients need a place to park.

"You can't run this school without parking, because the patients all come here with ailments," Mr. Monahan said.

It's a parking plan that has won support from some in the historic preservation community who were concerned MCPHS might instead seek to tear down the 41,000-square-foot Mechanic Street building. Constructed in 1926, the building boasts elaborate carvings on its entries and is listed as a Massachusetts historic property.

"We worked with President Monahan to try to come up with a way that would provide parking for the acupuncture school, which is really important, and also preserve the integrity of the building and the area," said Deborah S. Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, an organization that advocates for historical preservation. "They really didn't want to do something that people weren't excited about."

City officials said they had not yet received MCPHS University's plans for the property but did issue a demolition permit in March. Mr. Monahan said the university has completed engineering work for construction and will now seek permits.

The owner of 18 buildings in downtown Worcester, MCPHS University is a Boston-based institution that offers degrees in health fields such as pharmacy, physical therapy, nursing and optometry. About 2,000 of the university's 7,250 students are enrolled in programs at the Worcester campus.

MCPHS brought acupuncture into the fold when it acquired the New England School of Acupuncture, a Newton institution with about 200 students, in June 2015. In Newton, the school's students typically treat patients about 9,000 times a year, according to Sue Gorman, the school's executive director.

In Worcester, she said, "We want to do more than 9,000."

Under MCPHS, the acupuncture school will maintain a Newton campus until students that started there graduate. The newest class of 23 students started last month in Worcester, and future classes will study in Worcester, too, Mr. Monahan said.

"In three years, we'll be out of Newton," he said. "Everything will be here. The goal is 500 students."

City officials have welcomed MCPHS as the university has slowly purchased and renovated downtown buildings, some of them decrepit and underused.

MCPHS bought the Norwich and Mechanic street buildings in 2006. It waited until last year to launch renovations at 19 Norwich St., which also is listed on the state's historic register.

Now the five-story structure features classrooms, a function room, and a ground-floor clinic with sleek, muted décor and 11 treatment rooms. Mr. Monahan was scheduled to get the Worcester program's first acupuncture treatment Tuesday.