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# Parishioners vow legal action to save Mount Carmel from diocese-driven demolition

By Tom Quinn -



Parishioners sign a petition to save Mount Carmel/Steven King photos

A movement started by Our Lady of Mount Carmel parishioners to override the wishes of the Roman Catholic Diocese has picked up supporters in high places, and organizers say they've talked with legal experts who have given them hope that they have legal standing to challenge any future demolition orders.

Mayor Joe Petty, At-large City Councilors Kate Toomey and Moe Bergman, District 2 City Councilor Candy Mero-Carlson, former District 2 Councilor Phil Palmieri, School Committee member Dianna Biancheria, Worcester Register of Deeds Anthony Vigliotti and a host of prominent members of the local Italian community stood in the cold in the parking lot outside Mount Carmel on Wednesday. The church has been closed [since an 11:30 Sunday Mass](#) after architects said they could not certify the building as structurally sound. Monsignor Stephen Pedone said the church does not have the money for costly repairs that might not fix the damage done by nearby I-290, and the diocese wants to demolish the building.

Parishioners, who have heard about impending doom for Mount Carmel for years and failed in a capital campaign effort in 2007 that aimed to fix the crumbling facade, have different ideas, and are trying to take control of the church's destiny into their own hands, diocese be damned.



“Under no conditions should we see this church demolished,” Palmieri said.

Carmelita Bello, who describes herself as a life-long parish member, is leading the charge to save the parish, recruiting parishioners to various committees. She, and Palmieri, said lawyers have been contacted, opinions solicited, and parishioners have a shot at contesting a “decree of suppression,” a document in Catholic canonical law that accompanies church closings.

Legality aside, the presence of so many elected officials puts political pressure – which some attendees explicitly called for – on the process. The diocese will need to seek a waiver from the one-year waiting period to demolish a historic building, and Bello said she has asked for Preservation Worcester’s help in saving the church as well. Petty hosted

a meeting between interested parties yesterday, and Carlson called for another community meeting on the City Council floor last night.

“Any chance we can keep it open, we should try to keep it open,” Petty said of Mount Carmel, long a hub for the Italian community in Worcester.

Pedone drew the ire of many parishioners for what they see as siding with the diocese and the engineers who inspected the building over the welfare of his flock, although Pedone has maintained the issue is one of public safety, since the facade could crumble into the nearby highway. Parishioners have suggested having Mass in the nearby parish center instead of merging with Our Lady of Loreto, and some in the crowd made comments about not trusting Pedone anymore and of standing up to a priest who has told them “lies.”



Mayor Joe Petty addresses the crowd at the vigil.

Asked whether, if her group pulls off what would be a minor miracle and saves Mount Carmel from the wrecking ball, the parish would go back to hearing Pedone lecture them on faith and morals, Bello said she didn't see why not.

“If we get through this and we're all on the same page, that's fine,” Bello said.

Bello's main point is that parishioners should be involved in the administration of church finances and operations, and called the response to her vigil and to a petition circulated to save the church “incredible.” There were also fears that the diocese would cash in on a valuable piece of property – the church and parish center together are valued at more than \$5 million. The secondary message, from Palmieri, current elected officials and others was that the issue is not going away, despite what the diocese would prefer.

“This isn’t about signing a petition and walking away,” Mauro DePasquale, who started the petition, said.

Asked after the vigil if parishioners had a case, Bergman, who is also an attorney, said he didn’t believe the issue was as black and white as it might first appear. During the vigil, he made a more emotional appeal to match the mood of the dozens of parishioners gathered – and more might have showed up if a Sons of Italy event was not happening simultaneously next door.

“If faith means anything, this is a good time to expend it,” Bergman said.

