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## Worcester eyes historic district to save Our Lady of Mount Carmel church

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WORCESTER - In an effort to spare Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church from a date with the wrecking ball, a City Council committee has recommended creating a local historic district that would include the Mulberry Street church building, its rectory and the Joe DiMaggio Little League Field behind it.

The three-member Municipal Operations Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendation Tuesday night, and it will go to the full City Council next. City Solicitor David M. Moore said the council vote is a needed first step to create a local historic district.

"There needs to be some kind of initiating action," Mr. Moore said. "It can be done by the City Council, or the city manager can recommend it. But there needs to be a trigger action to get this before the Historical Commission for a study."

The city has three local historic districts - Massachusetts Avenue, Montvale and Crown Hill. Such districts afford protections to buildings within them when it comes to demolition or renovations.

Mauro DePasquale, president of the Mount Carmel Preservation Society, said getting the church included as part of a historic district would greatly aid his group's efforts to preserve the historic structure.

He said the church is of great historical significance to Worcester's Italian-American community and a key anchor to the Shrewsbury Street area.

"This church is of significant cultural and architectural importance," Mr. DePasquale said. "This is a church that has been respectful to immigrants, both old and new. Preserving this church will send a message to Worcester that this city respects immigrants, past and present, and their families."

"This is not a pipe dream," he added. "Work is being done to repair the church and we hope to get back in there for Christmas."

The church has been shuttered since May 1 because of structural problems with the 88-year-old building.

In a statement Wednesday, Monsignor F. Stephen Pedone did not comment on efforts for a historic district, but he indicated finances remain an issue and that it might be some time before the church would again be safe to hold services.

"It is important that everyone understand fully what has been done this fall on Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church," he said. "The current work of anchoring the exterior facade to the church structure was originally estimated at \$120,000. That, together with the removal of the pediment stones, steel banding of the cupola and protective netting the parish previously committed to in January, will total approximately \$200,000.

"None of that addresses the interior issues which preclude use of the building in the foreseeable future, such as rosettes which have fallen from the ceiling," he said.

The parish has exhausted its savings and has relied on a loan from the Diocese of Worcester to accomplish the exterior work, he said.

In June, the diocese petitioned the Worcester Historical Commission for a waiver to the city's demolition-delay ordinance, which puts a one-year hold on razing historic structures.

But the commission unanimously rejected the waiver request, as members did not believe that keeping the church up for another year would pose an undue economic hardship on the diocese.

After the commission action, the diocese announced it was going to make the \$120,000 in repairs to shore up the building's facade.

John R. Kelly, city commissioner of inspectional services, told the Municipal Operations Committee that work being done to the church could be completed in the next few weeks.

But he said even if the work passes inspection by his department, it would be up to the diocese to decide whether to allow people back into the structure.

When asked by District 3 Councilor George J. Russell if Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church needs to be knocked down, Mr. Kelly said: "As far as I'm concerned, no."

Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, spoke in favor of creating a local historic district for the church, but said if the city is going to do so it will have to move quickly.

"The clock is ticking," she said. "This would have to go very quickly. We view this building as a significant building in the city and definitely would like to see it preserved. Historic buildings are what make us special and unique. To take down this historic structure would be very sad for us as a city."

District 2 Councilor Candy Mero-Carlson, committee chairman, echoed that sentiment.

"Now more than ever we need to make sure Mount Carmel remains standing," she said.

Mr. Moore said if the entire council concurs with the recommendation of the Municipal Operations Committee, it will be referred to the Historical Commission, which could decide to do a feasibility study on creating a historic district.

The results of such a study would be sent to the Planning Board and the Massachusetts Historical Commission, he said. The Worcester Historical Commission would then have to wait 60 days before conducting a public hearing.

The City Council would make the final decision on creating a historic district.