

## Could this historic Notre Dame Church be converted into a 'tower brewery?'



*Preservation Worcester commissioned this projection of the words "Save Me" onto the Notre Dame church, which is being targeted for demolition.*

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In a last-ditch effort to spare the Notre Dame des Canadiens Church from the wrecking ball, Preservation Worcester has crafted a proposal to bring before city hall Tuesday night that reimagines the historic building.

The group's concept, called the "French Market de Worcester," imagines several retailers transforming the once dormant church into a hub of entertainment and food.

They also estimated the costs of bringing the church up to code and renovating it to close to \$20 million, which could be covered by historical and federal tax credits.

A document drafted by the group shows an ambitious reimagining of the church, including a ground floor of entertainment outlets, like bowling rinks and arcades.

Above that, Preservation Worcester suggests building an international food market with vendors hailing from the city's diverse cultural groups.

To top it all off, the proposal calls for a "tower brewery," that stacks brewing machines on top of each other. If built, it'd be one of the first of its kind in the United States.

According to a statement from CitySquare II developers, the proposal is interesting, but ultimately unrealistic.

"People have come up with numerous potential uses for the space and we appreciate that Preservation Worcester has yet another idea for the space. But it is just that -- an idea that is in the form of a marketing proposal presented at the 11th hour without a developer or investor willing to make the financial commitment."

As time runs out for advocates seeking to save a historic church in Worcester, a group on the forefront of the battle to save the structure says developers have shut them out.

Deborah Packard, of Preservation Worcester, said that several developers have toured the building with their group, and several were interested in renovating the property, rather than demolishing it. Although she couldn't name whom specifically, she did say that a developer was interested in opening a brewery and turning the building into an indoor market.

The Notre Dame Church was purchased by CitySquare II Development Co. in 2010 after it stood dormant for years. Last April, CitySquare, and the firm managing Notre Dame's development, Legat McCall Properties, failed to receive a demolition delay waiver, meaning they'd have to wait a year before tearing it down.

During the demolition delay period, development firms are encouraged to discuss alternate uses for the building with concerned groups. One of those groups, Preservation Worcester, is not happy with how the property owners have acted in the past year.

The group had had trouble getting into contact with CitySquare II, although, according to a statement from the company, multiple tours of the property were conducted with the group over the past year.

In March, Legat McCall announced that it had entered into an agreement to sell the building to an unknown buyer.

But just because there might be a new buyer in the mix doesn't mean the folks at Preservation Worcester haven't continued their work to save the church. Their proposed uses for the Notre Dame Church are ideas open to whomever ends up owning the building.

"That's part of our message tonight, whoever it is, if they actually end up buying the building, we want to know who," Packard said. "We're down to the wire here so we're asking the city council to join with us in asking the owner to give us some more time to explore the leads that we have and not to run into the demolition because once it's demolished it's gone."