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Demolition awaits old St. John's High in Worcester

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By Jeremy Shulkin, Correspondent

WORCESTER – The Worcester Historical Commission will hear arguments next week to expedite demolition of the old St. John's Roman Catholic High School building on [Temple Street](#).

C&S Harding Street, a company managed by Worcester Railers Hockey Club owner Clifford Rucker, applied for a demolition delay waiver through the city Planning Department. The waiver, if accepted by the Historical Commission, would allow the developers to circumvent the one-year waiting period required to demolish historical properties.

Mr. Rucker stated that the initial plan is to pave the lot for parking. He said there is the potential for a hotel and retail space. The lot is across the street from the under-construction [Worcester Ice Center](#), also owned by Mr. Rucker.

[The Worcester Railers](#) are a minor league hockey team that will begin its inaugural season at the DCU Center in the fall.

"I certainly recognize how it could be very heartbreaking to somebody who went to high school [there] to see it demolished. I can see how that would be disturbing," Mr. Rucker said.

Despite the building's history, Mr. Rucker said "it's absolutely not feasible to renovate it."

With the presumed popularity of the Worcester Ice Center and its future as host of collegiate and junior hockey games, as well as a myriad of other skate-centric events, Mr. Rucker said he doesn't want the out-of-town crowd parking in the shadow of a building in such disrepair.

The school building, a 1925 Classical Revival brick and stone structure, has sat vacant for 40 years. St. John's High School finished moving to its current Shrewsbury campus in 1962, after which it was used as a grammar school before closing for good in the mid-1970s.

More Video: Demolition of the Gardner Cinema building begins.

The property has changed ownership a number of times in the years since, culminating in C&S Harding Street's purchase in September 2016 for \$2.1 million. That transaction included surrounding properties, such as 90 Harding St., which is currently occupied by the Compass Tavern.

Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, said she wanted to get a better grasp on the condition of the building before offering a comment on behalf of her organization.

She did touch on the history of the block: "There's something to be said about the church and the rectory and the school. It's a little community of buildings there." she offered. The still-operational church and rectory were not included in the sale to C&S Harding Street.

The old St. John's was not listed on Preservation Worcester's Most Endangered Structures list for 2016.

While the demolition delay ordinance was put in place to encourage property owners and developers to find ways to revitalize historic properties, Mrs. Packard acknowledged that cost is a significant factor when determining potential rehabilitation.

She expects Preservation Worcester will appear before the Historical Commission on April 13 to offer an opinion.