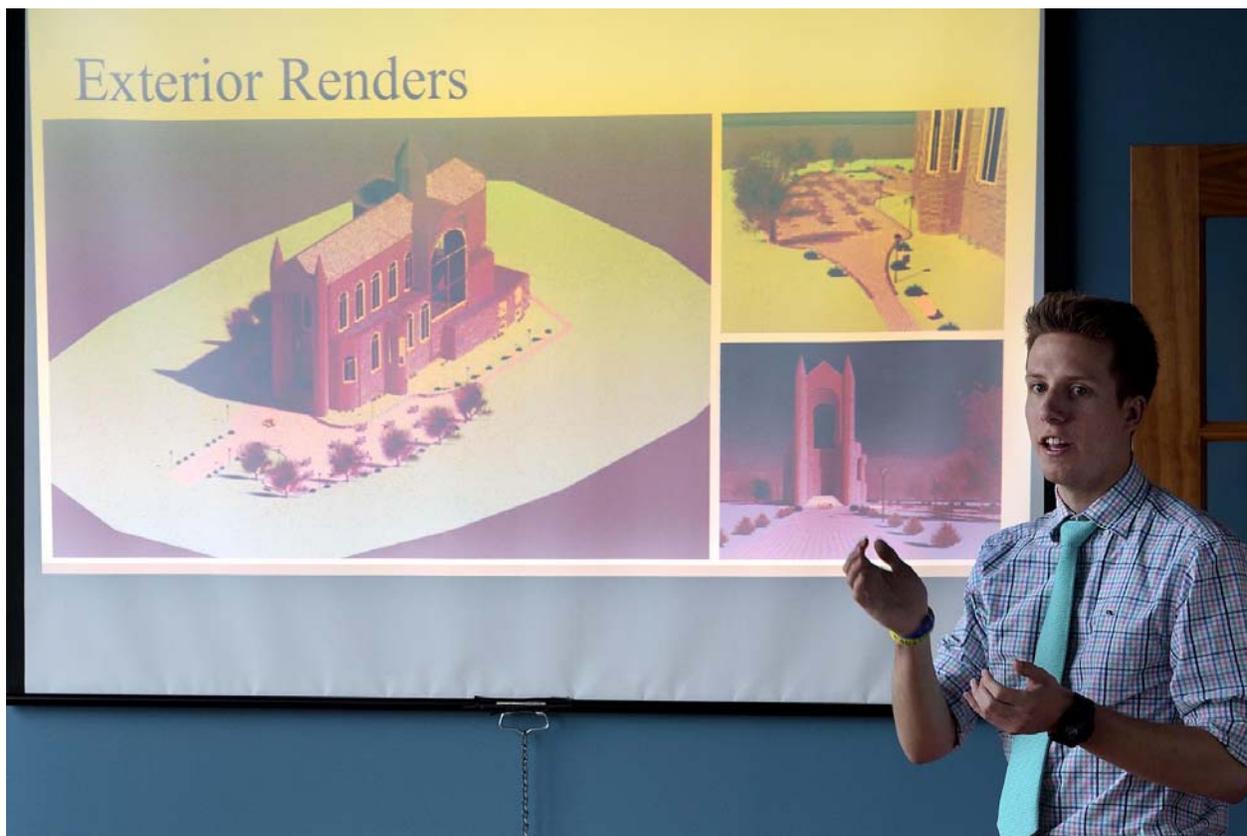


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WPI students showcase ideas for reusing Notre Dame church

Tuesday

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WORCESTER - A gym, a contemporary art museum, an urban marketplace?

Worcester Polytechnic Institute architecture students had many suggestions Tuesday for reusing Notre Dame des Canadiens Church.

“Look at the wonderful ideas these students have presented,” said Dorothy Hargrove, a volunteer with Preservation Worcester. “Why would you ever want to tear it down?”

Located just off the east end of the Common in the CitySquare development area, Notre Dame des Canadiens Church at one time served as the epicenter of Worcester's large French Canadian community. But the church, which was built in 1929, has been vacant since 2007.

CitySquare II petitioned the Historical Commission last year for a waiver to the city's demolition delay ordinance, which automatically puts a one-year hold on the demolition of historic buildings. But the Historical Commission rejected the request for the waiver, saying the razing of the church would be detrimental to the historical and architectural resources of the city.

The demolition delay expired April 15, meaning the church can be demolished at any time. Meanwhile, the developer of CitySquare announced that it has entered into an exclusive [agreement to sell the church](#), but has not identified the potential buyer. Deborah Packard, executive director of [Preservation Worcester](#), [said the organization also has found a potential buyer](#), who made an offer on the building.

But students in an architectural design class at WPI also had options for how to reuse the structure, suggesting the church be converted into a restaurant, a community center and cafe, an urban marketplace like Quincy Market, a gym, or a contemporary art museum.

Although the ideas for the space differed, several common themes emerged.

All proposals included space for food - whether several different types of food stations as part of an Italian eatery, a rooftop cafe on an art museum, or a small snack bar at a gym.

Glass was used extensively in the suggested designs, to allow views of the church structure and to bring light into reused or new spaces. Two designs called for glass additions that incorporated stained or colored glass. One incorporated a greenhouse to support a cafe and also function as indoor green space. Another envisioned "butterfly wings" on either side of the nave to add space that would be part of a contemporary art museum. The gym proposal included a glass ceiling to reduce heating and cooling costs while allowing light in and views out.

Loft spaces were also popular ways to increase floor area and allow for views throughout the church. One loft platform even included a waterfall.

The students were big fans of radiant floor heating.

All of the proposals met standards for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold certification. None of the proposals included cost estimates.

Students said the project was a unique opportunity to work on something that had real-world applications.

"It was not just an abstract concept that our professor thought of but a real project of revitalizing a church," junior Steven Knott said. "I feel like it was a very rewarding experience we definitely will be able to utilize in the future."

Adjunct professor Soroush Farzin-Moghadam said the project was “one step toward saving the building,” as it gave Preservation Worcester (which he said suggested the project) concrete ideas for possible reuse of the building.

“The actual green building is saving existing buildings, especially like this one that has some historic meaning as part of the history of Worcester,” Mr. Farzin-Moghadam said.

Ms. Packard praised the students’ work.

“I was really impressed by the creativity of the students and the fact that they came up with five different scenarios that all were pretty unique,” she said. “I also was impressed with the research they did in the demographics of the downtown - for instance, would a restaurant work in that area - and the zoning. I just thought they did a nice job.”