

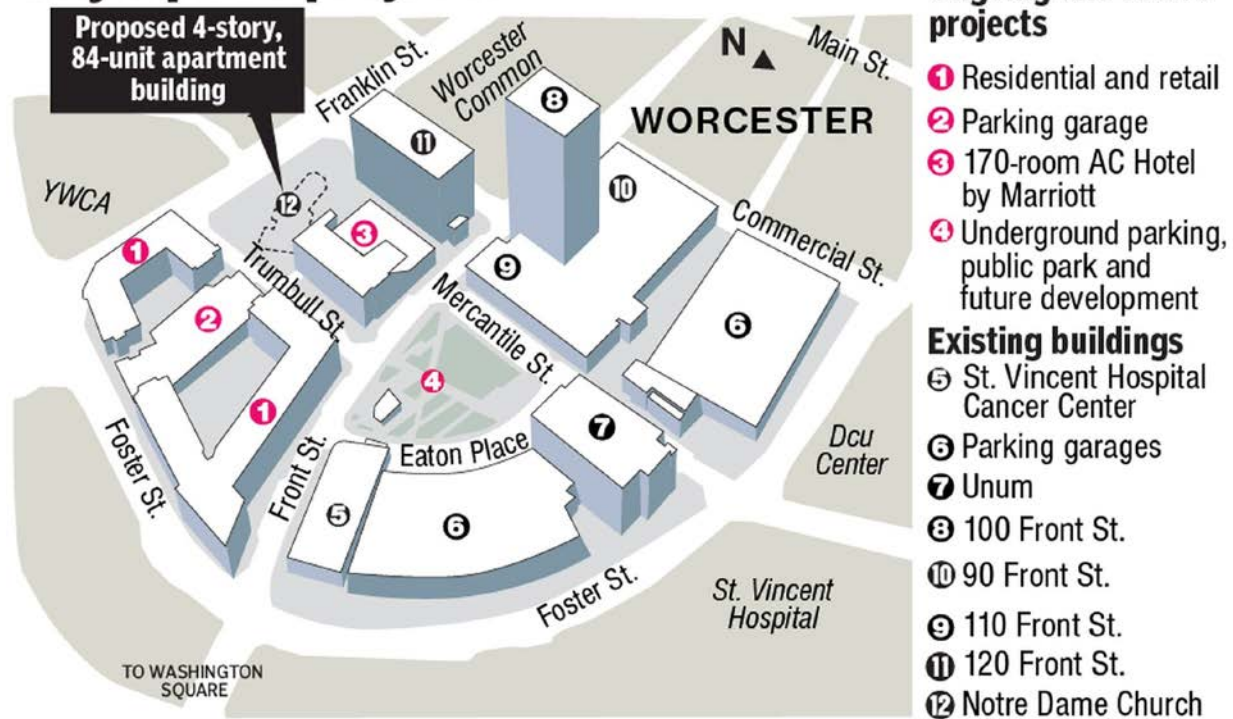
Worcester board OKs apartments at Notre Dame site

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WORCESTER - The Planning Board Wednesday night approved plans for a mixed-use development with 84 residential units on the site of the [former Notre Dame des Canadiens Church](#).

CitySquare projects



Source: Leggat McCall Properties LLC

DON LANDGREN JR./T&G STAFF

The action all but strikes the final bell for the downtown landmark, which will be razed to make way for the project.

Ivan M. Baron, chief legal officer for Roseland Residential Trust, an affiliate of Mack-Cali Acquisition Corp., said Planning Board approval will enable Roseland to begin demolishing the

church and construct in its place a \$30 million, four-story building that will include roughly 2,025 square feet of ground-level retail space at Franklin and Church streets.

At the urging of Planning Board members, Mr. Baron said efforts will be made to attempt to incorporate some elements of the church within the building, such as its bell and some of its stained glass.

“We are extremely excited about this project,” he said. “Without a doubt, the church is a beautiful building and we do not take its demolition lightly. But since the church was shuttered 10 years ago, significant money has been spent on trying to repurpose the church, all without success. The church has fallen into a state of significant disrepair and it has created safety issues.”

Stephen Rolle, director of the city’s Division of Planning and Regulatory Services, said the proposed project is a “by-right” development and will not require special permits or zoning variances.

In addition, no further city approval is required regarding demolition of the church. A one-year demolition delay for the building expired April 15.

The developer simply needs to pull a demolition permit from the city for razing the church. Mr. Baron did not provide a specific timeline.

Roseland has an option to purchase the church property, which is owned by CitySquare II Development Co. LLC, the developer of CitySquare.

CitySquare II gave Roseland authorization to file a definitive site plan application for the property with the Planning Board. Now that it has received approval of its plan, Roseland can go forward with acquiring the 1.34-acre church property.

Roseland is the same developer that is constructing 365 market-rate apartments within CitySquare, in an area bounded by Front, Foster, Franklin and Trumbull streets. The cost of that project is about \$100 million, according to Mr. Baron.

[The 84 market-rate residential units](#) planned for the church property will consist of 21 studio apartments, 39 one-bedroom apartments, and 24 two-bedroom apartments. The project also includes 86 parking spaces in a surface lot that will be built behind the building.

Planning Board approval of the site plan came after some two hours of public testimony, with more than two dozen people making a final pitch to save the church or have it incorporated in some way into the project.

Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, said Notre Dame Church is a historic site of great importance to the community. She urged the developer to keep the “majestic” structure standing.

She said it is important to have a balance of old and new, and residential and commercial, in downtown Worcester.

City Councilor Konstantina B. Lukes called Notre Dame Church a “piece of public art,” adding that it will be replaced by “plywood boxes.”

She said Union Station and Mechanics Hall were saved after people said they needed to be taken down, and she believes that Notre Dame can be saved as well.

Several other people spoke of the need for studies to be done on the impact the development will have on downtown traffic, pedestrian safety and air pollution before any plans are approved.

Several members of the local carpenters’ union also spoke out against the developer, saying there have been “wage theft” issues with the project it is building in Worcester and its use of out-of-state, nonunion workers for the project.

Kevin Ksen, who is with the carpenters’ union, urged the Planning Board to look into those issues, as well as request various impact reports from the city administration so it can have all the information it needs before taking a vote.

Stuart Loosemore of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce was the only person to speak in favor of the project, saying it will add to the density and vitality of the downtown.

Planning Board Chairman Andrew Truman said demolition of the church was out of the hands of the Planning Board.

“It’s not an easy decision, but we can’t stop the church from being knocked down,” he said.

Notre Dame Church was built in 1929 and has been a downtown landmark for decades, overlooking the east end of Worcester Common at Salem Square.

It is next to a 168-room hotel being built at CitySquare.

The church has been vacant since 2007. CitySquare II purchased it from the Worcester Diocese in 2010.

In a statement issued Wednesday night, CitySquare II reiterated that it made “continuous and concerted efforts” in the past several years to find a reuse for the building.

“We have worked with other developers and various architects, engineers, contractors, and other professionals and have explored numerous renovation and reuse options - including a hotel, performing arts venues, residential uses, restaurant and bar, marketplace, as well as other facilities of public accommodations,” the statement said. “None of these proved economically viable and we decided to sell the building.”