

What's the Rush? Once Worcester's Notre-Dame des Canadiens is gone, it can't be replaced (viewpoint)

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The interior of the Notre Dame Church.

By John Guastella

There seems to be agreement that a City Square revitalization incorporating Notre Dame is more attractive than one without it. Hanover Insurance, the owner of the historical, and considered by many to be one of the five most architecturally significant structures in the city, had originally planned to incorporate the structure into the project. In March 2017, Worcester's city council voted overwhelmingly in support of the effort to save the structure, and there is significant public support. With all of this support, there must be a creative solution to save the building.

As reported in a [March 7 MassLive story](#), the one-year demolition delay expires on April 15th of this year. Hanover Insurance must file a demolition permit with the city by that date or it will have to restart the demolition process.

However, that is all Hanover needs to do. They do not have to start demolition. The permit can be filed and demolition can be delayed for six months and then another six months before the demolition has to begin without starting the process again.

What's the rush? There are no plans to develop the site. Roseland Trust, the developer of 145 Front Street, and Hanover Insurance invested over 6 months last year to hammer out a deal to demolish the building and erect a new structure, without an agreement.

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According to [a T&G article](#) of March 3rd, 2018, Notre Dame apparently been for sale for the past three to four months. Who knew?

I encourage Hanover Insurance to take advantage of the six-month delay, put out a press release that informs the public that the building is for sale, list the property with an aggressive commercial broker and set a sale price. Encourage our city councilors to reaffirm their commitment to the salvation of this structure and empower the city manager to use city resources to assist in this effort, as was done to save and reuse the courthouse. Don't assume the site is more marketable without the structure until we try.

We owe it to ourselves to allow developers that specialize in building reuse to create a plan that is economically feasible. Without an approved development of the site, it makes no sense to destroy the structure to create an empty lot. A six-month delay is a blink of an eye.

Regardless of the fate of Notre Dame, this should be a wakeup call to the residents of Worcester and Worcester County. Progressive cities across the country have ordinances that do not allow a structure to be removed without an approved development plan. While the structure is still standing there can be continued efforts to find economically sound alternative uses. We should expect the same for ourselves. If you agree, email your city councilor that you expect action.

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John Guastella is a resident of Worcester, Mass.