

Notre Dame church demolition set to begin



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Posted Apr 22, 2018 at 5:40 PM Updated Apr 22, 2018 at 5:40 PM

WORCESTER – The owner of the former Notre Dame des Canadiens Church is set to begin the first phase of taking down the historic downtown landmark this week.

Cutler Associates, a Worcester general contractor, has hired a demolition subcontractor that will begin mobilizing on the church site Monday, according to Pamela Jonah, a spokeswoman for CitySquare II, owner of the church property and developer of CitySquare.

She said the first phase is expected to take about six to eight weeks and includes the installation of fencing to safely secure the perimeter of the property, followed by the environmental abatement of the building's interior.

In a related matter, the Save Notre Dame Alliance, a group that is making one last effort to spare the church from the wrecking ball, has petitioned the City Council for permission to address it Tuesday night regarding the demolition of the church.

The group, which is headed by Ted Conna and former City Councilor Barbara G. Haller, also intends to ask the council for its support to help save the building.

“As a community, if we allow this building to be torn down it would amount to cultural vandalism,” Mr. Conna said in a telephone interview Sunday. “It’s not the easiest building to find a way to repurpose, we get that. But a lot more can be done.

“There’s no reason why we can’t decide to try harder and put more into saving this building,” he added. “Once this building is gone, it’s gone. We don’t get a do-over on it.”

The Save Notre Dame Alliance is in the process of raising money to fund its effort to save the building by putting together a financially viable redevelopment plan.

The group hopes to raise \$100,000 in pledges as soon as possible, according to Mr. Conna.

Ms. Jonah said until actual physical dismantling of the structure begins, CitySquare II will continue to consider “fair and reasonable offers” from serious investors.

But she added they must have the demonstrated ability to reclaim the building, including having the financial wherewithal, expertise, marketing plan and commitment to make any proposal truly viable with a definite and reasonable timeframe.

“Such proposals must include a detailed investment and development plan, with the sale and purchase price viewed as only one element of a comprehensive development proposal that carries a high likelihood of long-term success,” Ms. Jonah said Sunday. “Unfortunately, although we have received proposals and inquiries in the past, each withdrew after further consideration of the project.”

Because of the size and design of the church, the demolition process will be done in phases, Ms. Jonah said.

She said it will begin with fencing, interior environmental remediation and clearing, followed by the “surgical dismantling of the structure” and culminating with the removal of the remaining debris.

She said the fencing is needed for additional public safety and security considerations as the contractor mobilizes on site. Heavy equipment will be brought on site as needed, she added.

The entire demolition project is expected to take about four months to complete, according to Ms. Jonah.

In regard to the church’s bell and time capsule, she said the owner will assess the feasibility of removing those items when they get to that phase.