



City of Holyoke

Historical Commission

HOLYOKE HISTORICAL COMMISSION (HHC)

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Demo Delay Public Hearing Minutes

Sacred Heart-Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and Rectory
435 Maple St. Holyoke, MA

JAN 05 2023

Wednesday, October 25, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

Holyoke City Clerk's
Holyoke, MA

Meeting held at: Holyoke Council on Aging & Senior Center, 291 Pine Street, Holyoke, MA

Present: Chairman Christopher Gauthier, Joseph Mazzola, Elizabeth Rodriguez, Olivia Mausel,
Alternate: Jean Jonker

Municipal Staff: Marie Brazeau OPED

Meeting opened at 6:07, Introductions made, Procedure explained to the public – 2-minute speaking time. Sign in sheets, Interior church photos on display

Katie Manzi McDonough representing Egan, Flanagan & Cohen

1. Two demo permits pulled for the Rectory and the Church at 435 Maple St., Holyoke.
2. Don't delay the demo permit.
3. The diocese is trying to make the property safer and more valuable to the local community.
4. Diocese is seeking to serve the community and provide the sacraments.
5. Keeping an unsafe building in the opposite mission of the church
6. Code of ordinance Sec. 35 states 'blighted and vacant' properties contribute to the decline of the city and the neighborhood.
7. Blighted and vacant properties encourage temporary occupancy by transients, drugs and persons engaged in criminal activity.
8. Blighted and vacant properties effect the well-being of the city, the safety and welfare of the residents and causes significant cost to the city.
9. The church and the rectory are blighted and vacant properties.
10. Repair or restoration is not possible.
11. They are decrepit now because the community cannot support them – the community is not there.
12. Once a center of worship, it is now vacant.
13. Delaying based on nostalgia is contentious to public safety and a risk.
14. The Diocese has explored alternative rehabilitation since 2016- entertained any proposal that was put before the bishop's real estate committee.
15. That has been much time to consider alternatives to demolition.
16. The company in 2016 charged with estimates of repairs to both buildings estimate will exceed \$8 mill (Barry engineers)
17. In 2017, plaster began falling from the ceiling and the diocese was forced to close the church in fear of ceiling collapse.

18. In 2018 the Diocese learned that the decorative ribs had deteriorated and are cracking. The columns inside lean outward so that even a small tremor of nearby construction might cause a collapse.
19. Windows are falling out causing risk to local homeless who seek shelter in the church.
20. There is risk of serious injury, fire, or death.
21. We have offered sight visit for all of you to join us to observe up close.
22. There are photos here.
23. Demolition is imperative.
24. Cannot list the property for sale because it is unsafe.
25. Cannot afford to make it safe.

Fr. Reilly, St. Jerome's pastor

1. Two parishes were merged into St. Jerome's – Sacred Heart and Immaculate Conception
2. There were financial reasons to merge because all 3 parishes were struggling to survive.
3. Our outreach to the community of Holyoke is so important.
4. We continue to outreach.
5. Demo is urgent to prevent further vandalism of the property.
6. People sleep around there.
7. It costs the parish 8,500 a year to keep the rec hall open- to upgrade it will cost \$5-6 mil.
8. Its putting good money after bad
9. Arson and fire could be tragic for the neighborhood.
10. Perhaps we can rebuild a community center, but plans are nebulous.
11. Maybe there will be leftover land that we can work out with the city if the whole block is not used for future investment- we're trying to work that out.
12. Preserving the property prevents progress for this neighborhood.
13. This is not an historic district-this is a violent district.
14. Don't paralyze the neighborhood and the property.
15. Don't handcuff the church.

Olivia Mausel OM: Since 2017, the church has been closed. Property taxes have not been paid.

Katie McDonough: No non-profit in the state is required to pay property tax- we are seeking to demo that area eventually expand the non-profit activities.

OM: Are you familiar with Immaculate Conception, St. Michaels, and Our Lady of Hope all in Springfield? Those three churches are all in Local Historic Districts in Springfield.

KMcD: Our Lady of Hope in Hungry Hill is blighted and abandoned—too large to restore.

OM; Barry Engineers are not objective. They were used in Mater Dolorosa and the term 'structurally unsound' is too often used and inaccurate.

KMcD: 'Structural unsound' means employees should not go into the building.

Joseph M(JM): I have a letter from the Building Department stating that the Diocese has not yet remedied the broken window issues and a fee of \$300 a day will be levied until you comply with the order. The letter was dated Oct. 12 to the Diocese, and I have a copy dated Oct. 25th.

KMcD: Please forward council a copy.

Fr. Reilly: I don't have email- I did not get a copy.

JM: the building needs to be secured; windows covered with polycarbonate materials. The Diocese is still responsible for whatever happens. Has the church contributed to the downfall of the building? The blight has been at the hands of the church.

KMcD the cost of restoration is prohibitive for the Diocese.

JM: any attempt to sell the property?

KMcD: can't be listed because of safety.

JM: 'AS IS' sale is possible, and the city can take the property—there are options to relieve the Diocese of this burden.

KMcD: the burden is not financial- the burden is potential harm to people. To my knowledge no such offer has been extended to take the property.

Fr. Reilly: the Mayor met with me and counsel several days ago and we hope to resolve these issues.

JM: the Hist Comm can remove the demo delay at any time if things change.

Public comment:

Alex Genson: VOC -Valley Opportunity Council

We are restoring a block on Franklin and Chestnut St. It's an historic building. We started the process in 2016-2017. We have secured hist. tax credits, and the church is a critical part of the city. They were built in a way not like today. They bring character and pride to the local community, and they tell us where we came from.

I'm in favor of a delay. There is money available to secure funds and to restore our buildings and make the buildings stand out and bring it back to what it was. Once one building goes, then another, then a third it's a domino effect. It's the real fabric of the community. We don't need another CVS- that's not what we need.

Preserving Today will preserve tomorrow.

MaryEllen O'Connor: Holyoke resident

I speak in opposition to the demo delay proposal for the Sacred Heart -Our Lady of Guadalupe property on Maple St. Sacred Heart church has not been used since 2017 when safety issues forced its closure.

Cost of repair is \$8 mill.

Rectory became vacant in 2021. Its condition was so poor that demo was recommended-estimated cost of repairs; \$3-4 mill.

Our Lady of Guadalupe merged with St Jerome's in 2021, the Diocese officials and parish leaders agreed that the church and the rectory be demolished.

All items of sacramental value have been removed from the church.

Both buildings are unoccupied and unsafe

Both should be demolished to prevent illegal use and lead to dangerous risk to neighborhood and homeless.

Police and firefighters are in danger if they are called there for emergencies.

St. Jerome's parish should not have to maintain these buildings at an unreasonable cost to maintain the parish at the expense of their own.

Request the demo delay proposal be denied. Thank you.

Steven Huntley, VOC (Valley Opportunity Council):

We are neighbors. The VOC block, the church and the Nuevo Esperanza project and we have received \$4mil in historic tax credit to continue to restore the block. The windows are expensive, but it looks amazing.

The church is the heart of the Churchill district.

We ask for a demo delay and ask the Diocese to put the property on the market.

Historic tax credits are available for those buildings.

They are a huge asset to the Churchill neighborhood and allow the ability to use historic tax credits. That money is essential for our building.

I see the church from my office on High St. the church is a beacon and a beautiful building.

I wasn't aware that the diocese is accepting offers on the building, so we haven't put in any offers we had no idea it was up for sale.

Oh, It's not? Didn't you just say that? Let's talk and dialogue to save the building. Thank you.

Susan Van Pelt- Holyoke resident

I have been in this position before when discussing Mater Delarosa at the War Memorial and here at the Senior Center.

It's a sad history it's the same history and argument from the church yet when they MD church came about, they had one heck of a time because the steeple was so sturdy.

I treat with great skepticism what the Diocese and their paid help have to say in this situation.

The state of the building I refer to the Building Dept and the City Engineer dept.

Your purview surrounds history, and the quality of historical structures bring to the neighborhood and community.

I'm a resident of Churchill and as the crow flies scarcely 2 blocks from MD.

This church is an integral part of the neighborhood its beautiful and historic.

The question before you as a historic commission is this building of historic value?

The unequivocally the answer is YES.

Impose the demo delay-even though the delay may prove futile as in MD.

I understand you don't have a good partner in the diocese in looking toward solutions that incorporate preservation. That's simple a fact.

Your charge is clear, my charge is clear. I came here to express my opinion even though it may be futile, but we will be judged as how we handle our responsibilities in the matter of the church. The diocese will be judged on how they handle their responsibilities.

Impose the Delay- thank you.

Peter Palombella 3 Center St.

I oppose the demolition. The church is an important to the Churchill neighborhood.

The city primary revenue is taking taxes and providing services so let's put the building on the tax rolls. That is the direction to go in.

Other concerns about money can be dealt with

We can find a proper reuse of these buildings if we have some time.

Invoke the delay.

Matt Mainville: Holyoke resident

The building is important to the Churchill neighborhood, its name's sake.

I recommend we take this opportunity to ensure that we explore all options to preserve.

Lauren Niles: Holyoke resident, Local Historic District Commission chair

I oppose the demolition.

The commission is working to make it an historic district.

Hold the delay.

The buildings can be listed 'AS IS' – 'Buyer beware' – it can be sold.

If the church can work with the city and residents to find another use if the former use ceases to exist. Thank you.

John Kelly:

Oppose the demo delay.

I served as chair of finance committee for many years- 65 years and understand costs and the conditions of the structures.

The church has been deconstructed – no altar, no statues, nothing. It is a shell.

Windows are open- that's vandalism, that's the condition, God forbid there is a fire.

It's not worth the time and effort.

I was the leading individual in the merger. It was at the request of the parishioners. There is another church fenced off, but you are only focused on Churchill?

The steeple can't be inspected-its overflowing with bird droppings- 4 ft.

At The LHD zoom meeting there were people who were denied entrance at that meeting.....

Only 2 minutes—totally unreasonable too

JM: those are the rules

Katherine Hopkinson: Holyoke resident

I recently moved to Holyoke, so I have no emotional stake in this, but I want to get involved in the community and have joined the Local Historic District commission.

The pastor of the Appleton church is in active discussion with the city to reopen and restore the church.

If the diocese is concerned about the safety, why don't they close the building to vagrants and secure the property? That is not being addressed.

Mimi Panitch: Holyoke resident

Obtain an independent evaluation of the structure and its safety conditions.

History is here.

We need to know -unlike MD – that demo is not necessary.

The pattern repeats itself; I have a great deal of sympathy for the parish and parishioners for the real financial burden placed on them- that's important.

The governing structure of the Catholic church that imposes this financial hardship on them. It's a profoundly wealthy worldwide institution that will not part with the 'Botticelli' painting at the Vatican to save a church in Holyoke.

It has emotional weight to it that we find ourselves in this situation again and again.

We knew in 2016 nearly 10 years ago that these buildings were in trouble.

It's the owner's responsibility to secure it.

It is not secured.

The state has recognized that communities have an interest in the beauty and historic neighborhood.

Thank you.

Marco Crescentini, Holyoke resident

I'm in favor of the delay. We need more time to keep the structure in place to repurpose it. I just came back from Italy and so many structures are repurposed and reused not just churches but the historic fabric of the city.

Keep the church and rectory as part of the historic fabric of the city and it will benefit the city.

Thank you.

No more comments were offered.

Motion to close the public hearing: Joseph Mazzola/Eliz Rodriquez= unanimously approved

Motion to open the Historic commission meeting: Joseph Mazzola/Eliz Rodriquez- unanimously approved.

Chris Gauthier: The public is welcome to stay.

Motion made for a demo delay for Sacred Heart/Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and the Rectory
Olivia Mausel/Eliz Rodriquez- unanimously approved

Meeting adjourned: (50:47 Minutes) 7:45 p.m.

Warm Regards,



Christopher Gauthier
Holyoke Historical Commission Chairperson