

Historic commission OK's demolition of Roxbury school

Panel cites lack of Dearborn options



MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Some community members have long objected to knocking down the Dearborn school building, which they say is crucial to the history of women’s education in Boston.

By Monica Disare | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT AUGUST 03, 2015

Boston is moving ahead with plans to raze the century-old Dearborn school building in Roxbury this fall and replace it with a new school, after the Massachusetts Historic Commission agreed that there were no suitable alternative sites.

The Greenville Street site is set to become the Dearborn 6-12 STEM Early College Academy, which officials said will provide students with a state-of-the-art facility to learn science, technology, engineering, and math. It will be the first new school building constructed in the city in more than a decade.

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The decision fell into place following a letter from the Historic Commission accepting the demolition plans, school officials said.

“That is what gave us approval to move forward,” said School Department spokesman Richard Weir, who added that preparatory work for the demolition will begin this month and the hard demolition starts in September.

The letter from the MHC, sent last month, said the commission had analyzed the city’s potential alternative sites and agreed there were no viable substitutes.

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Plan to demolish Roxbury school hits snag

The Mass. Historic Commission is formally asking the city to stave off demolition of the 102-year-old building.

Dearborn school deserves to be saved, residents say

“After a review of the information submitted, the MHC has determined to accept, with mitigation, the adverse effect on the historic property. . . due to the lack of prudent and feasible alternatives,” reads the letter, signed by Brona Simon, a state historic preservation officer and the executive director of the commission.

A group of community members has long objected to knocking down the building, which they say is crucial to the history of women’s education in Boston. The original building was the city’s first public vocational school for girls. The school taught home economics, which in the early 20th century meant public health, nutrition, and cooking, said Alison Pultinas, a preservationist with Friends of Historic Mission Hill.

But even the most ardent supporters of preserving the building now see their hopes dashed. When asked whether she thinks Dearborn could still be saved, Lorraine Wheeler, a neighborhood resident, said flatly: “No. This letter certainly says that the building can be demolished.”

“If you ask people from outside who don’t know anything about this neighborhood, they might not have a problem with demolishing the building,” she said. “But we did.”

Some officials were more measured, taking care to point out that the agreement between the commission and the school district is still in progress.

Brian McNiff, spokesman for Secretary of State William F. Galvin, said negotiations are ongoing and that the commission has no formal legal power over the project. The commission’s job, he said, is to ameliorate any adverse effects during the construction of a new building.

But some preservationists said the commission’s decision helps pave the way for the destruction of the building.

“This is a major change in the status,” said Greg Galer, executive director of Boston Preservation Alliance. “Is it 100 percent? No. Is it pretty much there? I would say yes.”

Community members have taken issue with what they see as a lack of transparency in the process. Wheeler said a group of community advocates uncovered several viable alternatives to building on the Dearborn site that were not taken seriously.

The district contends that the process was fair and exhaustive.

“Boston Public Schools engaged in a fully transparent process with the abutters and other stakeholders,” said Carleton Jones, executive director of capital and facilities management for Boston Public Schools. “We did an extensive review of eight alternative sites proposed by community members and BPS, and found that none of the locations were deemed suitable due to a variety of reasons.”

City Councilor Tito Jackson, who represents Roxbury, is thrilled by the new development, which he said will help a generation of students.

“I was happy for the young people in the city of Boston who are planning to enter careers in science, technology, and math,” Jackson said. “It is an exciting day in Roxbury.”

Monica Disare can be reached at monica.disare@globe.com.

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