

Brewery coming down

DEMOLITION GO AHEAD:

Historical value not enough to save Heidelberg complex

BY KATHLEEN COOPER
Staff writer

Downtown Tacoma's Columbia-Heidelberg brewery buildings mark the spot of an important part of Tacoma's history, but that's not enough to save them from the wrecking ball.

The owners of the brewery complex at South 21st and C streets plan to demolish the 80-year-old structures to resolve a November dangerous building complaint from the City of Tacoma.

When it's gone, the Brewery District will lose its last intact brewing complex, said local historic preservation consultant Michael Sullivan. Some buildings on the site of the Pacific Brewing and Malt-ing Complex a few blocks south will be affected by the extension of a Sound Transit rail line, he said.

"It's tragic that there's nothing there to save, but there really is nothing there to save," said attorney Gary Branfeld, who represents Tony and Barbara Trunk of Strand Investors, one of the Heidelberg complex's owners. Branfeld addressed the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission on Wednesday night, as



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built in their place were also built in the 1930s. Those still are historic buildings," she said. "I personally would feel it a big loss to lose these buildings."

Tony Trunk said that rehabilitating the building would cost millions that he and his co-owner, Lester Collons, don't have.

"We had one company that made an offer and spent a long time studying it and they were at a little more than \$12 million to do rehab and restoration," he said Tuesday. "Today, even if you could do it for half that amount, I don't suppose there's any market for it."

Demolition of the site down to the slab will cost about \$662,000 according to documents Trunk filed with the city.

How will they pay for that? "Very painfully," Trunk said after the commission's decision. He said that he and Collons will split the cost.

Local historic preservation consultant Michael Sullivan said this week that the Heidelberg brewery site isn't an easy case, though there are some elements that could be used in a new structure.

"The end result of this will be a surface parking lot in the middle of a historic district and that doesn't do anyone any good," Sullivan said Tuesday, before the commission voted. "If I were on the commission I would err on the side of keeping the building. The uncertainty of what would come if it were gone would scare me."

Branfeld told the commis-

sion Wednesday that the owners would work with the city on how the empty site would look. A Holiday Inn Express is planned for the lot north of the soon-to-be razed brewery.

City spokesman Rob McNair-Huff said Thursday that the complaint about the brewery was filed by the Tacoma Police Department's downtown community liaison officer.

"It was in response to concerns he'd been hearing from community about crime, the state the building was in, and the accusations about what might have been going on in the building at the time, including prostitution," McNair-Huff said.

City inspectors scheduled an inspection and found a host of problems, including unstable walls, an unsafe electrical system and standing water. McNair-Huff said that the city will take no further action as long as the building owner works to resolve the situation — which in this case means moving toward demolition.

Sullivan said the difficult economy has set the stage for these decisions.

"It's too bad that there isn't a way to ratchet back on the getting-rid-of-older buildings because of their condition. It's very much reminiscent of tools used by cities in urban renewal days in the 1960s," he said. "Basically anything that's old and looks old is a target for just tearing down even without a plan for replacement."

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tion plans for the old Heidelberg Brewery want to demolish it after the city determined it is dangerous.

Columbia-Heidelberg Brewery buildings 2120 South C Street



RICHARDS STUDIO COLLECTION/Tacoma Public Library

This 1957 photo shows the exterior of the Heidelberg Brewery building in downtown Tacoma.

A report prepared in 2008 and submitted to the commission indicates that although the buildings date from post-Prohibition construction in the mid-1930s, the "repeated modernization ... remodeling and expansion" in the 1950s and 1980s have left virtually none of the original 1900 brewhouse and offices intact.

On a 7-2 vote, the commission decided that the buildings, which aren't listed on any historic register, don't contribute significantly to the Union Station Conservation District. That clears the way for the owners to obtain permits to demolish it. That demolition should be complete by this summer, said Branfeld.

"This one has significantly lost its historic nature over time, which makes it less desirable to rehabilitate, because it doesn't have the architectural interest there to start with. You're working with a big block," said commissioner Pamela Sundell.

One of the dissenting votes came from Megan Luce, who tried to have the commission postpone a decision for 30 days to find out who designed the existing buildings. That measure failed, 7-2.

"The original wood structures may be gone, but what's

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The Heidelberg brewery's two icons that many people ask about are the sculpted depiction of the Student Prince that once hung over the main door, and the water tower. News Tribune columnist Peter Callaghan reported in 2009 that the prince disappeared in 2005 and may have been sold to out-of-town collectors.

As coincidence would have it, a representative of the University of Washington Tacoma was at the Landmarks Preservation Commission meeting Wednesday when it voted to allow demolition of the brewery to proceed. Milt Tremblay, the UWT's facilities manager, was there to discuss the Prairie Line Trail, but one of the commissioners pressed him on how the school planned to make good on the mistaken erasing of a Student Prince mural on down-

town's Joy Building.

He said campus officials "have tracked down owner (of the sculpted Prince), and he claims he sold it to someone else. We're working with (local preservationist) Michael Sullivan to track it down and procure it." After the meeting Tremblay said the owner he was referring to was one of the current co-owners of the brewery complex, Lester Collons. The school was working with him.

As for the water tower, Gary Branfeld, an attorney for the brewery complex owner, told the commission: "I personally wouldn't want to try to take it down safely. It is old and is in danger of falling over on a strong windstorm on its own." After the meeting Branfeld said the owners are open to suggestions about how to salvage the tower.

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