

SPRINGFIELD NEWS-SUN



Crowell-Collier Building declared a public nuisance

By Tiffany Y. Latta, Staff Writer

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SPRINGFIELD — The Crowell-Collier Building, a massive 900,000-square-foot warehouse downtown, was declared a public nuisance Thursday.

Clark County Common Pleas Court Judge Richard O'Neill met with the city law director and property owner Harry C. Denune's attorney in chambers Thursday and determined the building at 200 W. High St. is unsafe and ordered Denune to abate it.

O'Neill will meet with both sides again today to decide what happens next. Options include giving Denune time to bring the building to code or tearing it down.

"Everyone agreed it's a public nuisance," O'Neill said. "Now we have to decide what's the best and most efficient means of abating it so the area can be made safe."

O'Neill's ruling comes after the city in February declared the building unsafe, padlocked it, and sought an injunction closing it.

In May, during a repair work, a spark possibly from a worker's torch caused a two-alarm fire in the building that cost the Springfield Fire/Rescue Division \$10,500.

Wally Ratliff, building project manager, said he believes the building can be brought up to code. He estimated demolishing the building could cost about \$6 million.

Denune and Ratliff said they have made inroads in a "comprehensive" plan to bring the building up to code.

Ratliff said they have repaired two-thirds of the bricks on the exterior of the building, spent \$20,000 on the parking lot and moved dozens of trailers full of inventory out of the building in the last four to six months.

Engineers have also been retained and are waiting for city officials to tell them what other work needs to be done, he said.

"We want to bring it back to code," Ratliff said. "As we get one thing done they add one more. It's tough with a building that size to get everything done."

But the inroads Denune, 88, said he has made are not enough to satisfy city officials.

"Our view is that the progress has been minimal," said Springfield Law Director Jerry Strozdas.

Springfield Community Development Director Shannon Meadows agrees. But she and Strozdas have stopped short of saying the building should be demolished.

“We’re ready to say it needs to be safe and demolition does create a situation where it’s safe, but it’s not the only option,” Meadows said.

“The building continues to deteriorate, but there are other options than (demolition.)”

Denune purchased the building in 1972 and said Thursday he has an affinity for it because his grandfather, three uncles and two cousins worked there years ago.

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