

# SPRINGFIELD NEWS-SUN



## Part of Crowell-Collier is ordered demolished

Court orders items removed, certificate of occupancy revoked.

By Tiffany Y. Latta, Staff Writer

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SPRINGFIELD — Conditions at the Crowell-Collier Building are so dire a court order calls for a portion of the complex to be demolished, everything inside removed and the certificate of occupancy revoked.

The agreed court order negotiated Friday between city officials and property owner Harry Denune details plans to demolish central Building F and nearby structures; remove all asbestos by Nov. 20; and at the same time remove everything inside the massive 900,000 square foot building in a year.

Demolition could occur in about 90 days or less after asbestos in the building is removed, officials said.

Wally Ratliff, building project manager, expects it to cost Denune millions.

“He’s very distraught,” said Wally Ratliff, building project manager. “He just wants to save these buildings as much as possible and he’s committed to making it happen.”

The agreed order comes a day after the building was declared a public nuisance and more than a decade after the city’s involvement with the building intensified as a result of a massive fire in 1999.

The city then declared the building unsafe and cited Denune for 14 building code violations, the most serious involving the inoperable sprinkler system.

Over the years, the city has repeatedly padlocked the building and declared it unsafe after inspections found several code violations.

In February, the city won a temporary restraining order and again padlocked the doors after discovering the building had no electricity. The water was also shut off to avoid freezing pipes, so workers used portable toilets.

And in May a spark possibly from a worker’s torch caused a two-alarm fire in the building.

The Crowell-Collier Building was once a publishing giant that employed more than 2,000 people before it folded in 1956.

Denune purchased it in 1972 and has made a number of repairs in the last decade, including fixing the sprinkler system and bricks on the building, spending \$20,000 on the parking lot and removing dozens of trailers of inventory out of the structure.

But Springfield Law Director Jerry Strozdas said progress has been minimal and the order signed Friday will “remove the public nuisance aspect of the building.

“It’s going to require a lot of work and the judge’s order required the work to be done in a relatively short time,” Strozdas said.

Ratliff and Denune’s attorney, Jeremy Tomb, say Denune pays taxes on the building, has made repairs and repaid the city money spent fighting the fire in May.

But they said nothing Denune does is enough, because the city’s mission is to demolish the building that is impeding downtown revitalization efforts.

“This is not a deadbeat, slumlord kind of guy. He’s just caught in the crossfire of an economic development plan,” Tomb said.

Strozdas denied the city has development plans for the site, but acknowledged officials are pushing Denune to make the building safe and secure.

“We have no particular plan or nobody out there waiting in the wings to build a Taj Mahal. But we do think, for a number of reasons, the building needs to be safe for the protection of passersby and the citizens in general,” Strozdas said.

Springfield Community Development Director Shannon Meadows said the debris that fell from 10 E. Main St. Friday morning and injured a woman underscores the importance of the city’s effort to maintain aging structures like Crowell-Collier.

“It’s a reminder of what can happen when you’re dealing with older buildings,” Meadows said.

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