

Largo Hotel days numbered

The City Commission votes to raze the old building because it would cost up to \$2-million to restore it.

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LARGO - The place where Largo began may soon meet its end.

City commissioners decided Tuesday night to raze the 99-year-old Largo Hotel as well as the even-older Rufus McMullen family home attached to it.

City Manager Norton "Mac" Craig said it could cost as much as \$2-million to move and restore the building, located near Seminole Boulevard and West Bay Drive. By contrast, it would cost \$29,400 to demolish them and remove asbestos.

"It's cost-prohibitive to do anything with the building," said Commissioner Rodney Woods, one of four commissioners who toured the site Aug. 25.

Demolition would likely begin at the end of the month, according to a representative from Sonny Glasbrenner Inc., the company hired to do the job.

Other commissioners who toured the hotel agreed it appeared too dilapidated to save. But they pledged to preserve the site's historic significance.

"We need to preserve the area and hopefully designate it as a historical area," Commissioner Andy Guyette said.

Commissioners also plan to discuss historic preservation at a workshop next month.

Decades ago, the hotel was nestled in the hub of downtown, just west of the city's old train depot. It's not clear how old the McMullen home, which is attached to the back of the hotel, really is, but historians say it was where Largo was named in the late 1880s.

Former Largo Area Historical Society president Bob Delack said he's pleased that city leaders have made a commitment to preservation on some level, but he's tired of trying unsuccessfully to save Largo historical structures.

"We basically won't have any left," Delack said. "They've done a good job of destroying most of it at this point. Everything is already under the sword."

The hotel is in poor condition and shows evidence of mold, vermin and rust, the city staff said.

But Delack said staff members exaggerated the dilapidated condition of the structure, which he had visited a few months earlier, to make it look worse to officials. For example, he said, several rooms were blocked off with caution tape during the tour.

"We had entered all of those rooms before," Delack said. "If it was that bad, they should have condemned it long ago when there were people living in it."

The Largo Hotel served as a rooming house for transients for several years until a little more than a year ago, when the city bought both the hotel and the Rufus McMullen home for \$775,000.

The hotel, known as the Hotel Largo, was built in 1908 by F.M. Campbell, the owner of Largo's original feed store. Just south of the property sits the privately owned Johnson Building, also known as the Pinellas Hotel. Built in 1911, it's the city's only site on the National Register of Historic Places.

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