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LAND AND SPACE

Milwaukee Third Ward building, slated for demolition, to be restored as restaurant, tavern



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A Historic Third Ward tavern, damaged by fire and slated for demolition, would be restored under a new proposal.

The two-story building at 266-272 E. Erie St. was built in 1884, with an addition constructed in 1912, according to a city report.

It served as a Miller Brewing Co. tavern before Prohibition. The building was later used by other tavern operators, most recently the Wreck Room, before being converted in 1997 to Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design's Student Center.

However, it's been vacant since a 2013 fire caused extensive damage. The property was sold in 2014 to an investors group formed by developers Robert Joseph and General Capital Group.

The developers had preliminary plans to demolish the building and build an apartment high-rise on its lot.

However, that was made more difficult when the Common Council and Mayor Tom Barrett in 2015 designated the property as historic.

That designation requires the owners to get Historic Preservation Commission approval on any exterior changes, including demolition.

So, the developers took another look at the building and concluded it could be restored, said Sig Strautmanis of General Capital.

"We recognized this is a special little place for the Third Ward," Strautmanis said.

Working with architect Chris Socha of TKWA UrbanLab, the developers plan to make extensive repairs to the building, Strautmanis said Thursday.

There is a potential tenant for the 4,400-square-foot building, which would be restored as a restaurant and tavern. But the developers aren't ready yet to announce the operator's name or other details.

"We're positive it will be an awesome contribution to the Third Ward," Strautmanis said.

The Historic Third Ward Architectural Review Board this week granted conditional approval for the restoration plans.

The developers hope to begin those renovations this fall.

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