Historic designation backed for Handicraft Guild Building

Owner may sue if city blocks demolition

By Linda Mack
Star Tribune Staff Writer

The Handicraft Guild Building at Marquette Av. and 10th St. in Minneapolis may be small, but the effort to give it a historic designation has generated a major maelstrom — and now threats of a lawsuit.

The Minneapolis Planning Commission weighed in on the issue Monday evening with a vote to recommend that the City Council give historic status to the 1907 red brick building at 89-91 S. 10th St. and to its addition on Marquette Avenue.

Those who support preservation of the three-story building point to its importance as a cradle of Minnesota's arts community.

But building owner Margot Siegel opposes the historic designation. Her attorneys said it will scuttle a $9 million sale of the property to developer Ryan Properties, which wants to demolish the building to make way for a luxury hotel.

The historic designation would give the city the legal authority to block demolition or changes that are incompatible with the building's character.

Council Members Lisa McDonald and Lisa Goodman say they have the seven votes needed to support the historic designation when the issue goes to the council in late September.

The controversy isn't likely to end there. John Herman, Siegel's attorney, said his client will sue if the council doesn't allow demolition of the building, which has been on the market for years.

Herman said real estate appraisers Rupert & Rupert determined that such a designation would reduce its value by $3 million to $4 million.

"This one of the hardest buildings I could imagine to put into reuse," said Herman. "The land values are five times what the value of the building renovated would be."

Herman argued that the historic and architectural significance of the building does not warrant an historic listing. A study for Siegel by urban historian Tom Martinson concluded that the building was "palpably unsympathetic" to the Arts and Crafts movement, which emphasized simple hand-crafted design.

"There is nothing on the outside and almost nothing on the inside that reflects the Arts and Crafts movement," Herman said. He suggested a better testimony to the Guild's work would be a display, perhaps inside the future hotel.

**Women's history**

The building and addition were constructed to house the studios and meeting rooms of the Handicraft Guild, one of the earliest Arts and Crafts societies in the country. The guild, founded in 1904 by 11 women, was designed to bring arts into everyday life and to encourage arts education. It was folded into the University of Minnesota arts department in 1918.

Invoking the history of women, of arts in Minnesota and of the Girl Scouts, those who want to preserve the building countered Herman's arguments.

The Minneapolis Arts and Crafts society was the only one in the country to build its own facility, said Marcia Anderson, an expert on the Handicraft Guild and a Minnesota Historical Society curator. Jennifer Komar Oliver, assistant curator of decorative arts, sculpture and architecture at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, said the building is one of the few remaining structures that speaks to the artistic richness of the turn of the century.

The building also was the first home to the Girl Scouts in Minnesota, said Vivian Mason, who represents the Park Board and Recreation Board on the planning commission. Andrew Dipper, who works in the Marquette Avenue side of the building at Givens Violins, said the building not only retains its original character but also retains its original use as a home to arts and crafts. The studio spaces with large windows work beautifully for the bow and violin making that occur in the building now, he said.

The building also houses photography and graphic design studios and a cafe.

Goodman said it is time for the city "to walk its talk on preservation. . . . Buildings are being built and demolished with blinding speed in Minneapolis. . . . If not now, then when are we going to step in and stop it?"

McDonald blasted Ryan's hotel plan, which she said would destroy not only the Handicraft Building but everything else on the block between Marquette and Nicollet Mall and 10th and 11th streets except the WCCO-TV building. "If we build it, what will we have for convention-goers to look at?"