

# Fire hazard

## City acts quickly to avert second disaster

By Jeff Hinkle

**W**orcester officials are scrambling to extricate the city from the tangled ownership web surrounding a second abandoned cold storage building in town that bears frightening similarities to the former Worcester Cold Storage building.

City code inspectors, along with a detective from the Worcester Police Department's arson squad, toured The Boston Beef Building at 81 Lafayette Street last week and verified the vacant structure posed hazards comparable to those found inside the Cold Storage building. But unlike the site of the Dec. 3 fire — which took the lives of six Worcester firefighters — the Lafayette Street structure is owned, in part, by the city of Worcester.

Meanwhile, contractors hired by the city began boarding up the doors and windows of the structure, abandoned for at least a decade, to prevent intruders from entering.

Although City Inspector Doug Scott declined to comment on any specific code violations he encountered inside the

structure's interior as dark and maze-like. Inside, he says, high brick walls are layered with "some kind of polyurethane coating."

That description brings to mind eerie reminders of the conditions firefighters encountered on the night of Dec. 3rd as they entered the Cold Storage building. It is now believed that the building's labyrinthian floor plan and polyurethane-layered walls contributed to the deadly circumstances that unfolded that night.

In the wake of that catastrophe, City Councilor Konstantina Lukes moved quickly to avert a second disaster.

"The first thing I did the Monday morning after the fire was ask to make sure [the Boston Beef Building] was secure," says Lukes. "I was especially concerned because the neighborhood it is located in has had a lot of arson in recent months and that building has a lot of similarities to the Cold Storage Building."

Lukes' apprehension sent ripples throughout city hall as authorities moved quickly to inspect and secure the Boston Beef building and determine its ownership.

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also confirmed that "several citations" for code violations had been issued following the inspection, but she declined to name those cited.

Determining who owns what has proven to be a complicated effort and one the City Treasurer's department has been working on since early this year. In January the land and the 55,000-square-foot building were sold at auction to a company doing business as 85 Green Street Trust, whose representatives at the auction were listed as Herb Rasnick and Joseph Bafaro. Rasnick is the owner of a parcel of land adjoining the warehouse.

At the time of the sale, it was believed Worcester was sole owner of the structure, but in February, after the auction, a sharp-eyed real estate attorney discovered a muddled paper trail documenting multiple owners.

As it turns out, the building sits atop four parcels of land. The city owns only one parcel, and therefore only one portion of the building. The S & G Realty Trust — the company that lost the property in the early

ment of the structure.

"It's a mess," says Thomas Zidelis, the city tax collector who has been working for nearly a year trying to determine ownership. "I've never seen anything like it."

Zidelis' research efforts went into overdrive last week in the wake of the fire and the inspection of the property. "It is an old headache that has become an urgent headache," says Lukes.

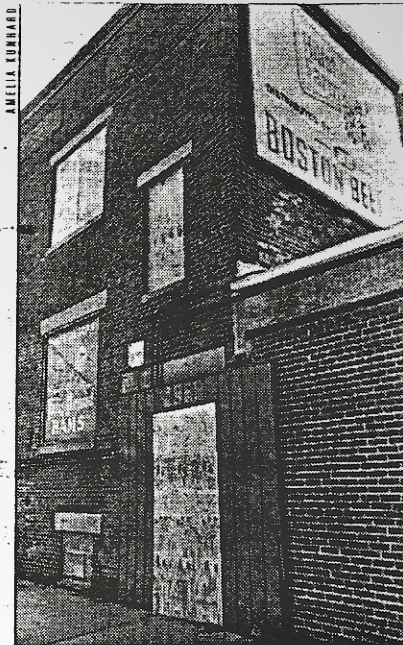
City clerks, though, were not the only ones busy last week. On Friday, Dec. 10 — one week after the fire — contractors, on orders from the City Code Department, hastily boarded up the dilapidated Boston Beef building. In an effort to keep unwanted tenants from entering the structure, many of the building's entryways now sport fresh sheets of plywood, newly fastened to decaying door and window frames. Meanwhile, other sections of the building — those sections not owned by the city, according to tax

records — are still barricaded only by flimsy, rotting wood. A determined intruder could break through these fragile barriers.

"Everyone is very concerned," says

"I was especially concerned because the neighborhood it is located in has had a lot of arson in recent months and that building has a lot of similarities to the Cold Storage Building."

— Konstantina Lukes  
City Councilor



Fresh plywood on cold storage building owned in-part by the city.

"It's a strange building," explains Lukes. "Although it looks like the city owns the whole structure, it doesn't. We did a title search that shows several owners." Lukes

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