



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, February 25, 2021

STATEMENT BY HISTORIC KANSAS CITY

Demolition of Westminster Congregational Church

Westminster Congregational Church - National Register of Historic Places

Old Hyde Park East Historic District - National Register of Historic Places

Old Hyde Park Historic District - Kansas City Register of Historic Places

Historic Kansas City has learned that the 1904, Gothic Revival, Westminster Congregational Church on both the national and Kansas City Register of Historic Places, 36th and Walnut, Midtown Kansas City, may face immediate demolition following an apparent roof collapse and exterior stone wall damage. The collapse does not appear to be caused by a storm.

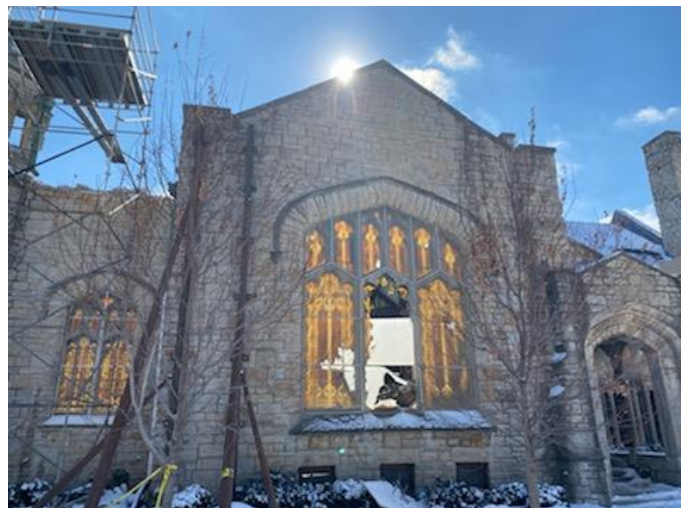
Historic Kansas City has been in contact with historic neighborhood leaders and City preservation staff to determine how a prominent landmark familiar to all on Kansas City's Main Street corridor has fallen into this condition. At this point, scant information is available. The owner states to us that an original design flaw is responsible and cites the opinion of engineers but otherwise does not substantiate that. It is unclear at the moment whether there might be grounds for further city review or that demolition is now a foregone conclusion.

Kansas City ordinances do not currently allow pre-demolition review for most historic structures. Snap demolitions proceed with little more than an application filed with the City and a quick counter review.

How can an historic district building be slated for imminent demolition without any warning, instead of securing the building and site for safety, followed by a meaningful review? Why is this demolition threatened with scant information for the public and a reasonable opportunity to seek alternatives? Neighborhood leaders and the community rightly ask whether there was some forewarning. We ought to know whether there were City licenses or permits for the building here which should have allowed for inspections and discovery of problems beforehand. Have there been structural modifications which may have led to this problem? Are there reasonable options to pursue an outcome other than demolition? Ready, fire, aim?

The Main Street corridor has lost many historic buildings and many that are left are threatened. The City has no ordinance protection for any significant and meaningful review of snap demolitions of most historic buildings. This church is supposedly protected by listing on the Kansas City Register of Historic Places. Is any historic building in this city safe when destruction so readily occurs? The City needs to make extraordinary effort to implement a safe standstill at this site so that reasonable mitigation and reclamation can be reviewed. The historic and scenic assets of the city must be protected and warrant better.

We stand ready to help along with all the many friends of this important structure. Hopefully in this incredibly fast-moving situation it is not too late.



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