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THA weighs Winthrop building purchase

By Todd Matthews, Editor

The Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) is considering whether to purchase the Winthrop Hotel building downtown, according to the agency's executive director.

On Wednesday, THA Executive Director Michael Mirra met with a small group of Winthrop residents, as well as representatives from the Tacoma Police Department, Safe Streets, the City of Tacoma, and the building's management company to address the issue.

"Rumors are flying that we have made a deal," said Mirra. "THA was asked if we want to purchase the Winthrop. We don't know if we can buy it. It's preliminary at this point."

Mirra added that THA and the building's owner, Tacoma-based Prium Companies, "haven't even entered negotiations yet. We're looking the building over to try and tell us the condition of the building and what it would mean to own it."

According to Mirra, THA has discussed the idea with City officials because the city has invested \$2 million in the building in the form of a federal Urban Development Action Grant and THA would need the city's help in order to complete any purchase.

"The city is aware that there is an interest and THA has been doing a vetting process, but the city hasn't been involved at this point," said City of Tacoma spokesman Rob McNair-Huff.

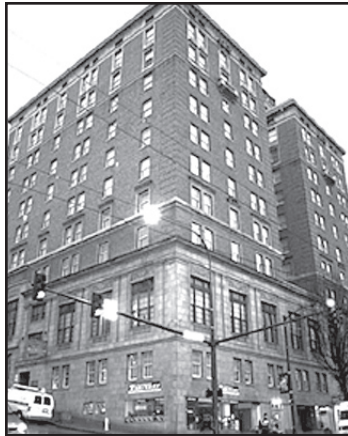
If THA does purchase the Winthrop, it would consider two uses for the building.

First, address decades of deferred maintenance by fixing up the building and keeping it in its current use as affordable low-income housing. Mirra estimates the building needs tens of millions of dollars in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation "or at some point the pigeons will move in."

Second, convert the building into a mixed-use property consisting of low-income housing, market-rate housing, and commercial office and retail space, and lease the ballroom to the public.

THA is expected to conclude its assessment of the building and make a decision in late-summer.

Prium purchased the building in 2007 with plans to restore it to a historic hotel and provide replacement housing for current tenants.



WINTHROP

Endangered Property: Bush House



EDITOR'S NOTE: On May 26, the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation announced its annual list of Washington State's Most Endangered Historic Places. The list dates back to 1992, and aims to raise awareness of historic properties that face demolition by redevelopment or neglect. Over the past 17 years, according to the Trust, more than 100 have been nominated by concerned citizens and organizations across the state. The organization also assists historic preservation advocates in developing strategies aimed at removing these threats.

This year's list includes Curran House (University Place); Alki Homestead Restaurant (Seattle); BF Tabbott House (Bainbridge Island); Bush House (Index); George Carmack House (Seattle); Day Block (Dayton); Old Ellensburg Hospital (Ellensburg); Libbey House (Coupeville); Post-Intelligencer Globe (Seattle); Sand Point Naval Station (Seattle); St. Edward's Catholic Church (Shelton); Surrey Downs (Bellevue); Vashon Elementary Gymnasium (Vashon Island).

Earlier this week, the Index began publishing a profile of each endangered property, as compiled by the Trust. Here is what the Trust has to say about the Bush House in Index.

Founded in 1890 as a way station for travelers venturing over Stevens Pass, the town of Index flourished during that decade and into the early twentieth century with the construction of

the Great Northern Railroad and the subsequent engineering marvel that is the Cascade Tunnel. With additional economic activity from mining, quarrying, and railroad construction needs, Index was able to sustain five hotels. Only one of these remains: the Bush House.

Constructed in 1898, the Bush House was initially managed by Clarence Bush and his wife who operated the property as a hotel serving railway passengers venturing over Stevens Pass. Although the business changed ownership several times, it managed to hang on to its original name. Closed for a period during the Great Depression and beyond, the hotel re-opened in the 1970s and continued to serve as a major community gathering place, hosting dances, community celebrations, meetings, concerts, and weddings.

Several years ago, Snohomish County revoked the hotel's Certificate of Occupancy due to structural and public safety concerns. Since this time, the building has been subject to vandalism and squatters. The structure's shingle roof is rotting and could be subject to collapse given the heavy snowfall that commonly occurs in the area. The property is for sale, but despite receiving several purchase offers, the owner has opted not to sell. The hope is that an agreement can be reached with a buyer interested in rehabilitating the Bush House. Of the five pioneer-era hotels that once served Index, the Bush House, listed in the Washington State Heritage Register, stands as the last remaining.