

Past could play part in site's future

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DELPHI -- More than 40 properties are included in the bid to get downtown Delphi listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

But after a fire destroyed the 1880s-era Kerlin building Wednesday, the listing that will be presented for consideration by a state review board in January is down one property.

"It certainly was not the oldest building on the square, by any means," said Anita Werling, past president of the Delphi Preservation Society, which joined Delphi Main Street Association to pursue the registry listing. "But this particular building dated from the 1880s, and it had an interesting facade."

On Monday, the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana sent examiners to check on the Kerlin building's neighbors. They want to ensure those buildings that shared walls with the toppled structure aren't at risk because of heat or water damage.

Werling said engineers were focusing in particular on the Moore block, at the corner of South Washington and West Main Street, which dates to the 1860s and now houses a realty office.

Also inspected was the building from 106 to 110 W. Main St., which Werling said is known as Mounts Hardware, a business the building housed for many years. That building shared a wall with the back of the Kerlin building, which had been located at 210 S. Washington St.

The preservation society and Main Street group have been working with Ball State University researchers to explore the history of downtown buildings since 2008 to put together a bid for the historic register. By spring 2010, Werling said the groups should know if the application is approved.

Though the Kerlin building's destruction won't derail those plans, it is a loss for downtown, said Hank Ivey. He is president of the Delphi Main Street Association and co-owns one of the buildings on the other side of South Washington Street.

Ivey said that when his family moved to Delphi about 3 1/2 years ago, the architecture around the courthouse square was one of the biggest draws to the town. In particular, the Kerlin building had features rare in other downtown facades, including bay windows upstairs and wood details on the first floor.

"It was one of the few brick buildings in downtown that was not covered with parging," Ivey said, referring to a process of overlaying bricks with plaster or mortar. "It had a lot of soldiering and diagonal brick design."

Soldiering is when a brick is laid up and down vertically instead of the traditional flat, horizontal design.

Fire Chief Dennis Randle of the Delphi/Tri-Township Volunteer Fire Department said the cause of the fire was still undetermined Monday.

Inspectors were still conducting interviews to try to pinpoint what started the blaze in an apartment above the Office Tavern around 10:45 a.m. Wednesday.

Randle said the city is working with building owner George Kerlin to determine how to clean up the wreckage. Kerlin said last week the building had been uninsured.

Ivey said that, ideally, a new building consistent with the downtown would go in there. If the owner decides not to rebuild, Ivey said the space could be used for needed parking downtown.

"Certainly, I want to see a structure put in that fits with the feel of the historic downtown," Ivey said. "A lot of people work hard to preserve the historic architecture. If we lose a building and replace it with a modern looking structure, it doesn't help maintain what we're trying to do."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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