

Owners of Easton shovel factory site may seek demolition permits

Owners of historic Ames factory site ask for applications to tear down 10 buildings

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EASTON — A decision by the Turner brothers, owners of the historic Ames shovel factory site, to obtain 10 demolition permit applications from the building inspector last week is raising concerns about their intentions.

Robert and George Turner have not returned the permit applications or provided a reason why they sought them for the shovel factory project, which is in the midst of a Chapter 40B hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The state Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs is also reviewing the Turner project under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, which regulates compliance with environmental and historic preservation issues.

Town Administrator David A. Colton said George Turner walked into the building inspector's office last Thursday and "asked if he needed demolition permits for each and every structure he intended to demolish" at Shovel Shop Square.

"When he was told yes, he asked for seven permit applications," Colton said. "He returned Friday and took out three more applications."

Colton said he notified the town's lawyer about the Turners' actions so that Building Inspector D. Mark Trivett will have access to legal advice about the procedures to follow if the Turners do submit the permit applications.

The filing would likely trigger the town's demolition review bylaw, Colton said. It would require the Turners to meet with the Easton Historical Commission to determine whether any of the buildings requested for demolition are "preferably preserved."

When buildings are "preferably preserved," developers are asked to work with the town for a year to find options other than demolition.

In October, at the request of the Easton Historical Commission, the nonprofit group Preservation Massachusetts named the Ames shovel factory site one of the state's "most endangered historic resources."

Historical Commission Chairwoman Melanie Deware suggested Monday that the Turners may have picked up the demolition applications for use when their 40B review process ended. The Turners have said they would demolish all or part of seven shovel factory buildings.

"Obviously (the commission) is concerned when any old building in town is slated for demolition, particularly when it is an important structure," Deware said. "However, until the applications are filed, we are still guessing as to the extent of the proposed demolition."

David Ames, president of the Friends of the Ames Shovel Works, a group formed to find alternatives to preserve the historic factory buildings, said the Turners' actions were a concern.

"We don't really know what the Turners have in mind here," Ames said. "But 10 demolition permits — it seems it would be impossible to use them all without demolishing some of the historically important buildings on that site."

Ames said the consultants working for his group had a "good meeting" with the Turners 10 days ago and that he hopes such meetings continue.

Meanwhile, "it's appropriate to take action to make sure the demolition permits are not issued and don't make it possible for the Turners to take anything down until there is a proper review," Ames said. "I'm not assuming the worst, but I am concerned."

Ames estimated there are 15 buildings on the shovel shop site. Some, built in the 20th century, are not important to the historic parcel, and the Friends would not object to their demolition.

"Others, really, are what makes the site special," Ames said.

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