

City will save old church

Huntington to move historic building

By Ann Pepper

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HUNTINGTON BEACH — A little church that has been a neighborhood landmark for seven decades will be saved from demolition and moved to a new site the City Council has decided.

The new owner of the building's corner lot at Pecan Avenue and 11th Street wants to build on the property.

Monday night the council approved \$23,000 to help save the Little Blue Church, as it has come to be called.

The church is a sentimental favorite in its old neighborhood, carrying memories of a boomtown landscape thick with oil rigs and populated by transplanted Midwesterners, said Barbara Milkovich, a leader in the effort to preserve landmarks of Huntington Beach's history.

It is hardly an imposing building. Colored the gray-blue of early morning seaside skies, it squats in one of the city's older neighborhoods — its little tower dwarfed by even a two-story building. Inside, it is cozy and inviting. Since the early 1920s, when it first opened its doors to Pentecostal faithful, its congregations cared for it well.

The city was rough-and-tumble

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in those first days, Milkovich said. Oil brought in enough workers to pump the city population from about 1,600 in 1920 to as many as 10,000 a year or so later, she said.

The church's congregation most likely was made up of oil workers, many of them from the Midwest, said Milkovich, chairwoman of the city's Historic Resources Board and an archivist for the Huntington Beach Historical Society. The church is on the historic board's "B" list of structures to be preserved.

"That means it probably would be eligible for a top (preservation) priority if we knew anything more about it," Milkovich said. "Part of the problem is that the interior has been modernized so it can't get in the National Register of Historic Places. This is one case where care has hurt a building's historical value."

But without that care, the church probably would not have survived, she said. And officials of the Huntington Beach Historical Society and the Historic Resources Board said they believe the building can

readily be restored to its original appearance.

"We'd like to put out an appeal for anyone who knows what it looked like originally or who might have pictures of it that would assist us in an authentic restoration," Milkovich said.

The new owner is "somewhat amused that anyone would want the old church," Milkovich said. He has been patient, but would like the building moved as soon as possible, she said.

In addition to the church, city historians hope to save the old Clark Hotel at the downtown corner of Main Street and Olive Avenue. City Hall wants to replace that building with a parking structure.

"We are very concerned with the fate of the old Clark," Milkovich said. "It's an 'A' priority structure, relatively unaltered and a fairly rare example of an early, small, beach hotel with retail shops on the street level. The way it is configured it could easily be converted to offices with retail below."

A 1901 beach cottage on Third Street also should be saved, she said.

Anyone interested in working with the historical society should call 962-5777.

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