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By Harold McNeil

Protection of Richardson complex is underway

A physical assessment of the neglected buildings and grounds at the historic H.H. Richardson complex is nearly complete, and efforts to protect the structures from further deterioration are under way.

The methods for achieving those ends are outlined in the Historical Structures Report produced by a team of architects and engineers. Details were shared with about 60 residents Tuesday during a meeting in the Polish Cadets Hall at Grant and Amherst streets.

“We’re moving forward on protecting the Richardson- Olmsted complex,” said Eva M. Hassett, a member of the Richardson Center Corporation board.

The principal architect in charge of the study, Jean Carroon of Goody Clancy, a Boston based design firm, said the Historic Structures Report is the first step in adopting a disciplined approach to the restoration of historic buildings.

“It’s a guide for how to approach the project,” Carroon said.

Both Goody Clancy and Simpson Gumpertz & Heger, a New York City-based engineering firm, are evaluating not only the current condition of the property, but researching nearly everything about its history. For instance, Carroon revealed, the iconic cooper roofs on the twin spires of the main building were originally made of clay tile, which early on resulted in leaking problems in the 19th century stone building.

Architect Henry Hobson Richardson was famous for his outsized Romanesque structures created in dark, rough stone with bold silhouettes and minimal ornamentation. However, as the complex expanded westward in the early 20th century, brick buildings were added to the main structure to reduce costs.

Matthew Bronski of Simpson Gumpertz & Heger took those at Tuesday’s meeting on a virtual tour of the complex.

Even the condition of the grounds, which were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, have been assessed.

Meanwhile, the Richardson Center Corporation has secured \$2.1 million to prevent further deterioration and vandalism at the site. Those and other stabilization efforts, including sealing roofs to prevent further water damage, are just temporary, Hassett said. “We don’t want to presume an end use for the buildings when that is not settled,” she said.

Carroon said the Historic Structures report will be completed in June, when work on a master plan will begin.