

St. Paul > East Side

Old 3M buildings may have sad fate

Agency won't guarantee their preservation

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They'll try to reuse, but if that doesn't work, it's demolition time.

The St. Paul Port Authority's top staffer said Tuesday that he'll try to honor wishes from an East Side advisory group to reuse several existing 3M buildings. But if they can't be sold after two years, they're coming down.

"If we do not succeed, it is my intention to pursue demolition," Port Authority President Louis Jambois told the authority's Board of Commissioners on Tuesday.

The discussion over the future of several buildings of the Fortune 500 company's former home comes as a deadline approaches next month for the agency to close on purchasing the remaining 11 acres of the more than 40-acre campus. In late 2008, the Port Authority agreed to buy the bulk of the campus, and it already has inked deals to sell off one parcel to Health-East's medical transportation unit.

But the remaining 11.4 acres — east of Arcade Street between Minnehaha Avenue and Phalen Boulevard in the heart of the campus — were part of a second phase of land acquisition and study. Officials from 3M said Tuesday if the deal falls through, the Maplewood-based company will pursue other buyers.

The Port Authority, Mayor Chris Coleman and others have said they want the area redeveloped to attract "green" jobs.

A community advisory committee on what the future of the 3M campus should look like recently recommended that a number of buildings of potential historical significance be preserved and sold for reuse. The advisory committee includes residents of the Dayton's Bluff and Payne-Phalen neighborhoods as well as groups like Historic St. Paul.

While Jambois said reusing buildings was preferable, he said that holding onto the buildings in question would cost roughly \$400,000 a year, an expense Jambois said could not be justified.

The Port Authority asked the advisory committee for its blessing if the agency wanted to demolish the buildings, but the panel refused.

No vote was taken Tuesday — the board has already given Port staff the authority to close on the property — but Jambois asked commissioners how they felt about it. All commissioners present, including St. Paul City Council President Kathy Lantry and East Side-based council member Dan Bostrom, indicated they supported Jambois.

Carol Carey, executive director of Historic St. Paul and a member of the advisory committee, said the entire process had been a "fair compromise."

Of some members' desires to keep some of the buildings, she said, "There's a certain pride with the fact that 3M, the company of innovation ... grew in Dayton's Bluff and the East Side."