

No salvation in sight for crumbling Cranston mausoleum

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By Paul Grimaldi

Journal Staff Writer



Roger Williams Park Mausoleum, languishing without an owner for nine years, has been fenced off to keep out vandals, but a contractor who inspected the site found graffiti inside.

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CRANSTON -- Death is permanent; a building's condition is not.

And, as the temple-like building at 100 Cyr St. crumbles to dust, it threatens the bodies of the 527 people entombed there.

"Eventually, something bad is going to happen," said Mark Russo, the Providence lawyer in charge of the building.

Thomas Cullinan opened the Roger Williams Park Mausoleum in 1926 as a profit-making enterprise just off the Providence line in the Washington Park neighborhood. The three-story building named for the Providence municipal park that it abuts became a sought-after status symbol among those looking for an eternal resting place for themselves or their loved ones.

As it stands, the building won't make it to the end of time.

The situation at the three-story, 60-by-66-foot granite building began falling apart nine years ago, with the death of the mausoleum's last remaining caretaker -- one of Cullinan's two daughters. When Katherine M. Cullinan died in 2002, her guardian found that almost no money was left for maintenance and repairs. The following year, a Superior Court judge ordered the mausoleum into receivership -- a form of bankruptcy where a court appoints a trustee to either liquidate a company or sell its assets to pay its debt.

In a twist of fate, Joseph P. Ferrucci, the lawyer appointed to find a solution to the mausoleum mess, died in November 2009, leaving the case to Russo, his law partner.

Russo has had no better luck than Ferrucci at solving the vexing problem of what to do with a building that no one wants and no one has the money to close. It could take \$1 million to \$2 million to disinter the bodies and bury them elsewhere, Russo estimates.

Just cleaning the inside of the building would take \$30,000, said the contractor he hired to inspect the mausoleum.

The roof leaks. Mortar is coming loose. Granite blocks are falling out. Windows are broken and boarded up. Inside, there is water damage, collapsed ceilings and mold, lead paint and asbestos.

The mausoleum has been fenced off to keep vandals at bay — a not wholly successful effort, according to a West Warwick contractor who inspected the building for Russo. There is graffiti inside.

“The building has to come down,” said Phil Pare, of Phil Pare & Sons Inc. “It ain’t worth fixing.”

Russo returned to court recently to ask Superior Court Judge Michael A. Silverstein to order the state or the city to address the situation. The judge, in turn, asked him to lay out the legal rationale for that at a hearing.

The state does not have jurisdiction over such properties. The state Department of Health has not inspected the mausoleum, according to spokeswoman Annemarie Beardsworth.

“I don’t think any city or town has money lying around to take care of this — and neither does the state,” Beardsworth said.

The City of Cranston wants no part of it.

The City Council in 2005 rejected a plan for the city to take ownership of the mausoleum.

City officials cannot go on the property unless an “imminent public-safety issue existed,” said Robin Muksian-Schutt, director of administration for [Mayor Allan W. Fung](#). And then, they would only do enough to stabilize a structure.

“It is a very sensitive situation,” Muksian-Schutt said. “You want to be mindful of the bodies that are in there.”

A plan to renovate the building as a funeral home and crematory never came to fruition.

Russo's effort to create a nonprofit fund to repair and maintain the building went "nowhere," said the lawyer.

Fewer than 10 families have claimed their loved ones, Russo said. That's not surprising, he said, because it would cost several thousand dollars to move a body and inter it elsewhere.

He's at a loss to resolve the fate of the entombed bodies "in a respectful fashion," Russo said.

"I can't take step one unless someone helps," he said.

pgrimald@projo.com