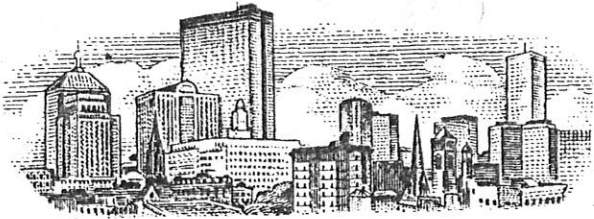


CITY SCENES



KEVIN CULLEN

Fix it or sell it, neighbors say

It was raining outside yesterday, and so it was raining inside parts of the huge buildings overlooking the Southwest Corridor in Jamaica Plain.

Leaky roofs are just part of the problem. Peeling paint and broken windows are obvious from the outside. Inside, tenants have lived without heat and sanitary plumbing. The four-story Victorian shells sit on an island of neglect, a block surrounded by Paul Gore, Lamartine, Danforth and Wyman streets.

They have been an eyesore for more than a decade and have become the rope in a tug of war between the landlord, George E. Carroll, who says he does not have the money to make major repairs, and neighborhood residents, who say the properties should be taken from Carroll and given to someone who can make repairs.

The residents see Carroll as a speculator who missed his ship, and who is now making a bad situation worse by seeking a ridiculously inflated \$1.5 million for the buildings. He bought the properties from the city for a song some 15 years ago. He paid just \$7,500, long before the Southwest Corridor project pumped up property values, and long before a new generation moved into JP, determined to make it a neighborhood — more than merely a place to live.

Joe Vallely, one of the neighbors who have been crusading to get Carroll to sell the properties to a nonprofit development group or a developer willing to set aside some of the 38 units as affordable housing, says the buildings have become infamous throughout JP, their size and rundown condition hard to miss.

“The buildings have been run into the ground,” he said. “There hasn’t been any substantial investment or improvement in them since Carroll bought them. They aren’t just an eyesore. They’re dangerous. There have been several fires there. People have been mugged there.”

At last count, only 14 of the units are habitable. Among those left living there is a 94-year-old man.

The city’s Inspectional Services department has hauled Carroll into Housing Court, a place where he has been so often in the past decade that he could conceivably be charged rent. Last week, Carroll said he had made some repairs. He vowed to make some more. He faces a deadline of Thursday. That is when Judge George Daher will be asked to decide whether Carroll should remain a landlord.

It is then that the future of what one housing inspector said was the worst-kept property in the city may become more clear.