**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES – PLANNING DIVISION**
*REPORT:* 36-70 Talcott Street, Hartford, CT 06103
For consideration: November 18, 2020

## STAFF REPORT

**TO:** **HARTFORD PRESERVATION COMMISSION**
**FROM:** Kate Montgomery, Consultant
Email: oneplan@hartford.gov

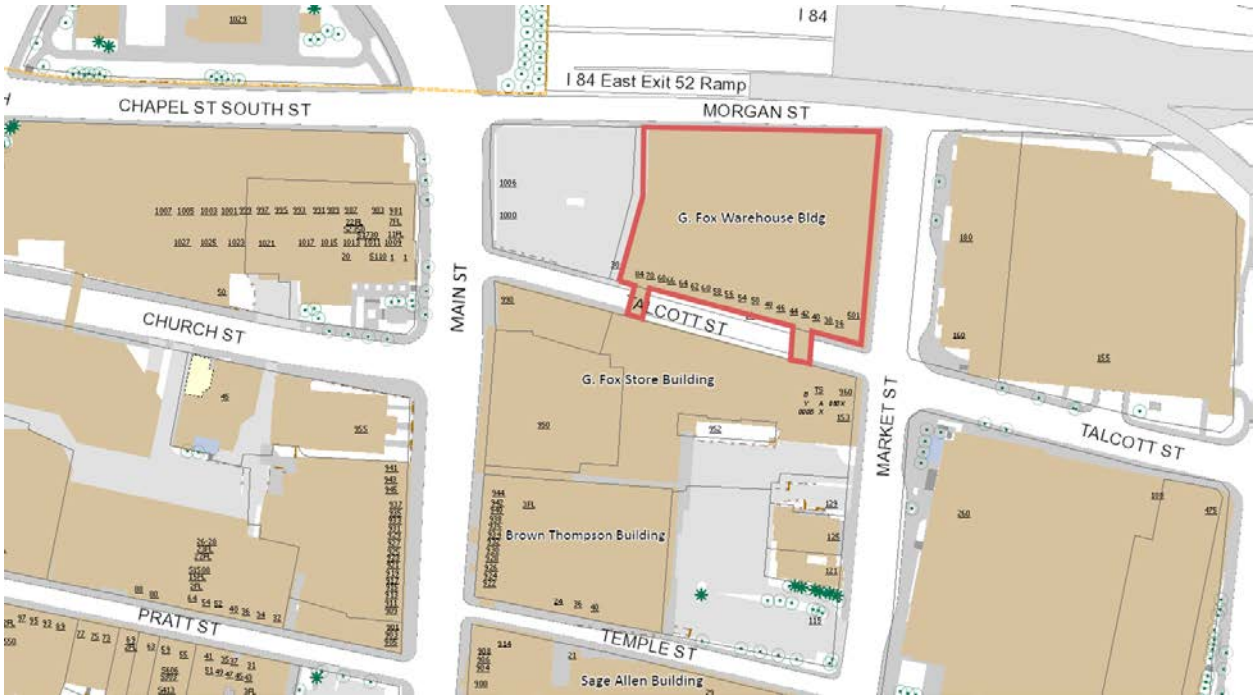
**PROJECT:** 36-70 Talcott Street Demolition
PARCEL ID: 268-349-022
ENERGOV ID: COMM-2020-0281

**ZONE:** DT-1 **HISTORIC DISTRICT:** Department Store National Historic District

**TYPE:** **ARTICLE XII HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**
Sec. 28-170 through 28-221

**APPLICANT:** Benjamin Schlossberg / 36-70 Talcott Street, LLC.

**OWNER:** 36-70 Talcott Street, LLC.




Location Map
(Structures outlined in red are subject to demolition/removal)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Department Store National Historic District was approved in 1995 and consists of three former department stores located on the east side on Main Street: Sage Allen & Co., Brown Thomson & Co., and G. Fox & Co. The nomination also included the former warehouse of G. Fox & Co. (subject of this application), a 1930's bridge connecting the G. Fox Warehouse with the store (a contributing structure also addressed in this application), and a large 1889 sidewalk clock outside the Sage Allen building (no longer standing).

This location was the flagship G. Fox & Co. Store and was closed for good in 1993. The subject of this application, the Warehouse Building, has been significantly altered overtime, as is further detailed in its particular mention in the historic nomination listed below.

**Proposed Project:** The applicant seeks to demolish the former G. Fox Warehouse Building located at 36-70 Talcott Street and remove the pedestrian bridges connecting it to the former G. Fox & Co. Storefront building at 956 Main Street. The application narrative states:

**The subject property is an abandoned former warehouse / office / parking garage with unsafe conditions dating back to 2012 (see attached Notice of Unsafe Structure from City of Hartford). Pursuant to the July 13, 2018 Tax Assessment Fixing Agreement between the City of Hartford and Applicant (Shelbourne Global) the City required "the demolition of the structures and the remediation of certain property" as terms of the agreement. This agreement was further amended on December 31, 2020 to allow the applicant an opportunity to perform investigative due diligence to determine if the structure could be renovated and not demolished.**

**Prior investigative reports from the two foremost parking consultants in the country, Desman Associates and Walker Parking, both noted significant deterioration and damage to the existing structure. Per both consultants reports the cost of renovation exceeded the economic viability of the property. In late 2019 through early 2020 the ownership group engaged a concrete repair specialist to survey the potential for repairing the garage in a last-ditch effort to assess the viability of leaving the structure standing. However, the final cost of these repairs again indicated that there is no financial viability to preserving the existing structure.**

**Like the prior efforts to come up with a viable renovation plan, the recently undertaken investigation into the viability of saving a portion of the structure (the 1918 portion of the building and attached pedestrian bridge) also resulted in a similar conclusion: the structures as they presently stand are both obsolete and hazardous and their repair is not economically viable. The applicant will agree to take all possible efforts to dismantle the historic bridge and either relocate it or place it in storage so that it can be incorporated into future use.**

## LEGAL STANDARD

The Commission reviews and acts upon all applications for Document of Suitability. No person or entity may, without first applying and obtaining the approval of the Commission, file an application for a demolition permit, or for a building permit for any protected property as designated in the Historic Preservation Ordinance Sec. 28-219.

## STANDARD SPECIFIC TO THE USE

The commission shall adopt the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Hartford Guidelines for Renovations and Additions to Historic Buildings.

According to page 3 of the adopted ***Guidelines for Renovations and Additions to Historic Buildings;*** *"Preserve the distinguishing character of your property. Removal or alteration of historical materials or architectural features should be avoided.", "Repair rather than replace deteriorated architectural features whenever possible."*

**FINDING OF FACTS**

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|---|---|---|---|
| **CURRENT USE:** | Vacant parking & office | **PROPOSED USE:** | Demolition |
| **YEAR BUILT:** | 1918, 1930 | **STYLE:** | Warehouse/Neo-Classical |

**Particular Mention in historic nomination:**
From section 7, page 3 of the 1995 Nomination, "G. FOX & CO. WAREHOUSE, 1918 (enlarged 1930), no style, concrete frame with brick walls (gray brick facade), 8 stories. Architectural details: corbelled cornice with simple parapet. Altered with new windows for office floors, conversion of lower floors to parking garage....
Warehouse is connected to store by copper-clad 2- story bridge above Talcott Street; Neo-Classical style, 1918. Details include paneled pilasters, clock face on second story, cornice with modillions and stepped parapet, and 12-over-12 windows. Photograph 10 (Figure 3 of this report)."
From Section 7, page 1, "The G. Fox warehouse has been renovated for use as offices, with several floors opened up as parking levels, and new parking structures (not included in the district) abut three sides of the building. Despite these changes, the original extent of the warehouse is still visible, and it retains most of its original appearance on its Talcott Street facade."

**Current Conditions:** The building at 36-70 Talcott Street has been vacant for years and left to deteriorate. The original contributing building is wrapped with a 1930's addition and the windows have all been removed and replaced with modern windows or partially bricked up, as detailed in demolition and construction plans dated 1985 and 1986. The exterior brick work and details remain and are primarily visible from Talcott Street, as noted in the district nomination. The older of the two pedestrian connection bridges still contributes significantly to the district, despite not being in use and needing maintenance and repairs. A recent windstorm removed a portion of the copper cladding from the lower portion of the bridge and other sections are loose and require attention.

**Condition of other properties in neighborhood:** According to the Historic District Nomination, "the buildings were all built as department stores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and together made up the core of Hartford's main retail center. The buildings, all of which have masonry exteriors, range in height from five to eleven stories and are extensively detailed with decorative ornament characteristic of their architectural styles. The 1876 Brown Thomson building, also known as the Cheney Block, is an example of Richardsonian Romanesque (designed by Henry Hobson Richardson himself), the Sage Allen building is in the Second Renaissance Revival style, and the G. Fox building is Neo-Classical Revival in inspiration. Except for the southwest corner of the Brown Thomson building, architectural elaboration is confined to Main Street elevations." The buildings maintain much of their historic integrity and are in fair to good condition.

Figure 1. Google Earth, dated 9/18/2019. View of the 36-70 Talcott Street the intersection of Main and Morgan. The original warehouse structure is located along Talcott Street, in the center of the image, and the copper, Neoclassical Revival bridge connects it to the former G. Fox Store on the right, now Capital Community College. The 4-story addition on the left that wraps the north and east sides of the Warehouse Building is not within the district.

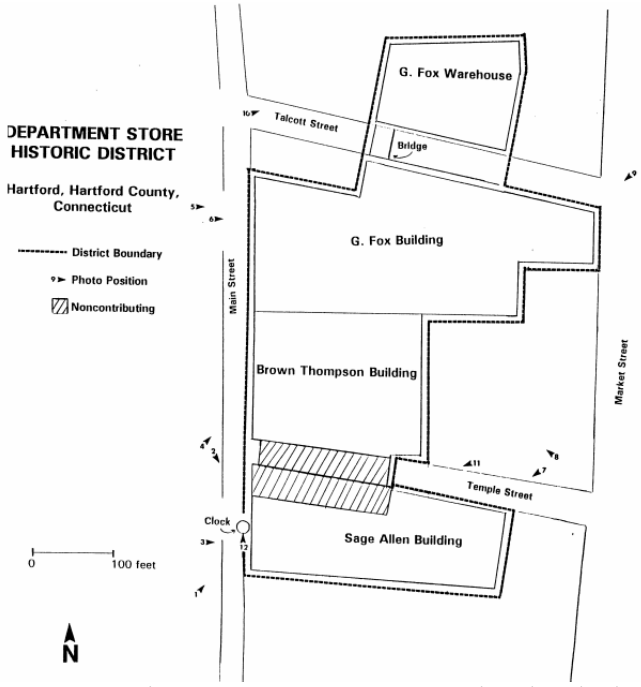


Figure 2. Diagram Map from page 37 the 1995 Department Store Historic District Nomination. The map shows the buildings that compose the district and locates the photos included in the district nomination. The building subject to demolition is referred to as the G. Fox Warehouse. The bridge will also be removed.

Figure 3. Photograph 10 of 12 from the Department Store Historic District Nomination, dated 1994. The original photo caption: "G. Fox Building warehouse and parking garage at 40 Talcott Street, camera facing northeast." The building exterior remains essentially the same today but with additional wear.

Figure 4. Google Streetview, dated June 2019. View east on Talcott Street from Main Street. The bridge is connected to the 1918, former G. Fox & Co. store building which is also of Neo-Classical Revival Style with Art-Deco marquise added above first story (1935, Taussig-Flesch Associates) and further addition to the rear and upper stories.

Figure 5. Google Streetview, dated June 2019. View west on Talcott Street from Market Street. The portion of the building on Market Street is a later addition and not part of the district. The pedestrain bridge shown connects the parking garage, right, with the Art-Deco style addition to the G. Fox & Co. store building, left. See attachments 2 and 5 for additional photos of the structures.

Figure 6. Connecticut Historical Society museum & library, Connecticut Images Collection, "Flood of 1936: pumping water on Talcott Street, Hartford." View looking west up Talcott St. The Warehouse Building, right side of Talcott, prior to removal of the original windows. This predates the addition to the store building on the left side of the street, constructed a few years later and shown in the following image (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Unknown photographer, "G. Fox Store, Hartford: Exterior view, 1938 addition construction [HSP 2485]." doi:10.2307/community.159454. Trinity College's collection of Hartford images holds this photograph taken during construction of an eastern addition to the G. Fox. Store building and shows a portion of the pedestrian bridge.

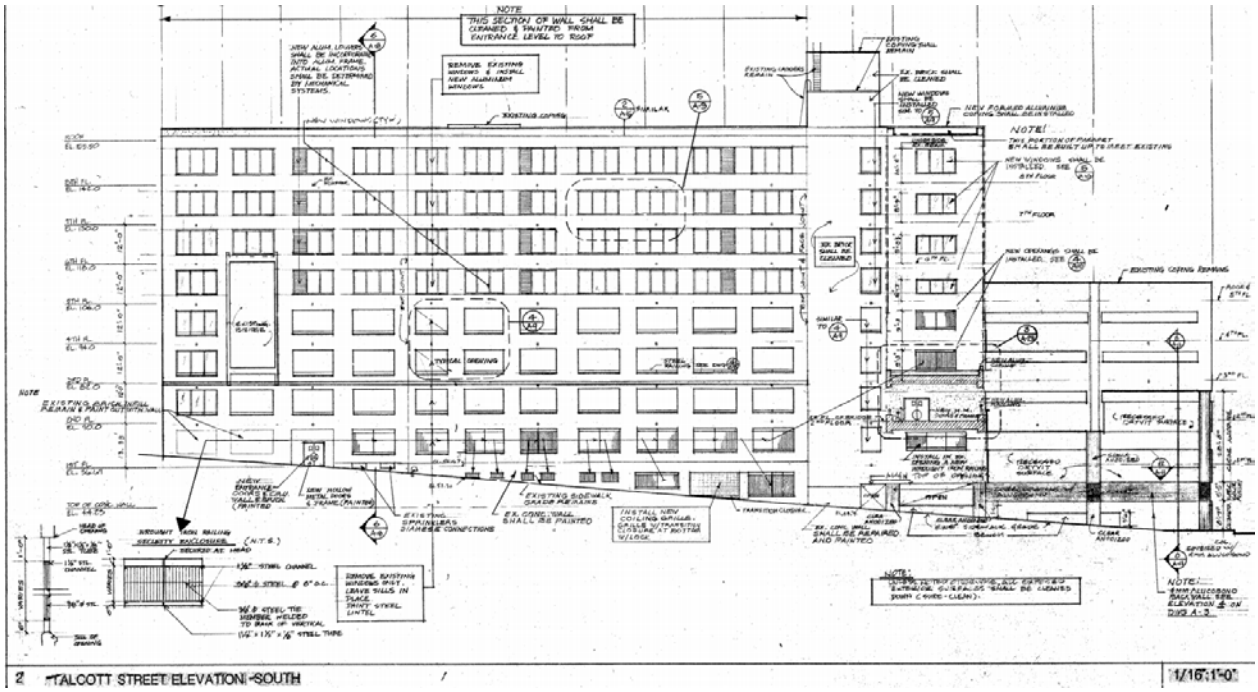


Figure 8. "Talcott Plaza" drawing set by Thomas Munroe Nicholes, AIA, & Associates, P.A. and Hallisey Engineering Associates. Printed April 23, 1986. This Talcott Street elevation is from plans with a handwriten

date on the cover, likely from the Planning or Building Department, of 5/5/1986, and appear to be one of the final revision sets the City received. The drawing set, found on the Hartford GIS scanned document viewer at address point 36 Talcott Street, depicts detailed drawings for the conversion of the lower floors of the 1918 Warehouse Building in to a parking garage, upper story window replacements, and other renovations to the structure. The set includes architectural and structural drawings and is included as Attachment 7.

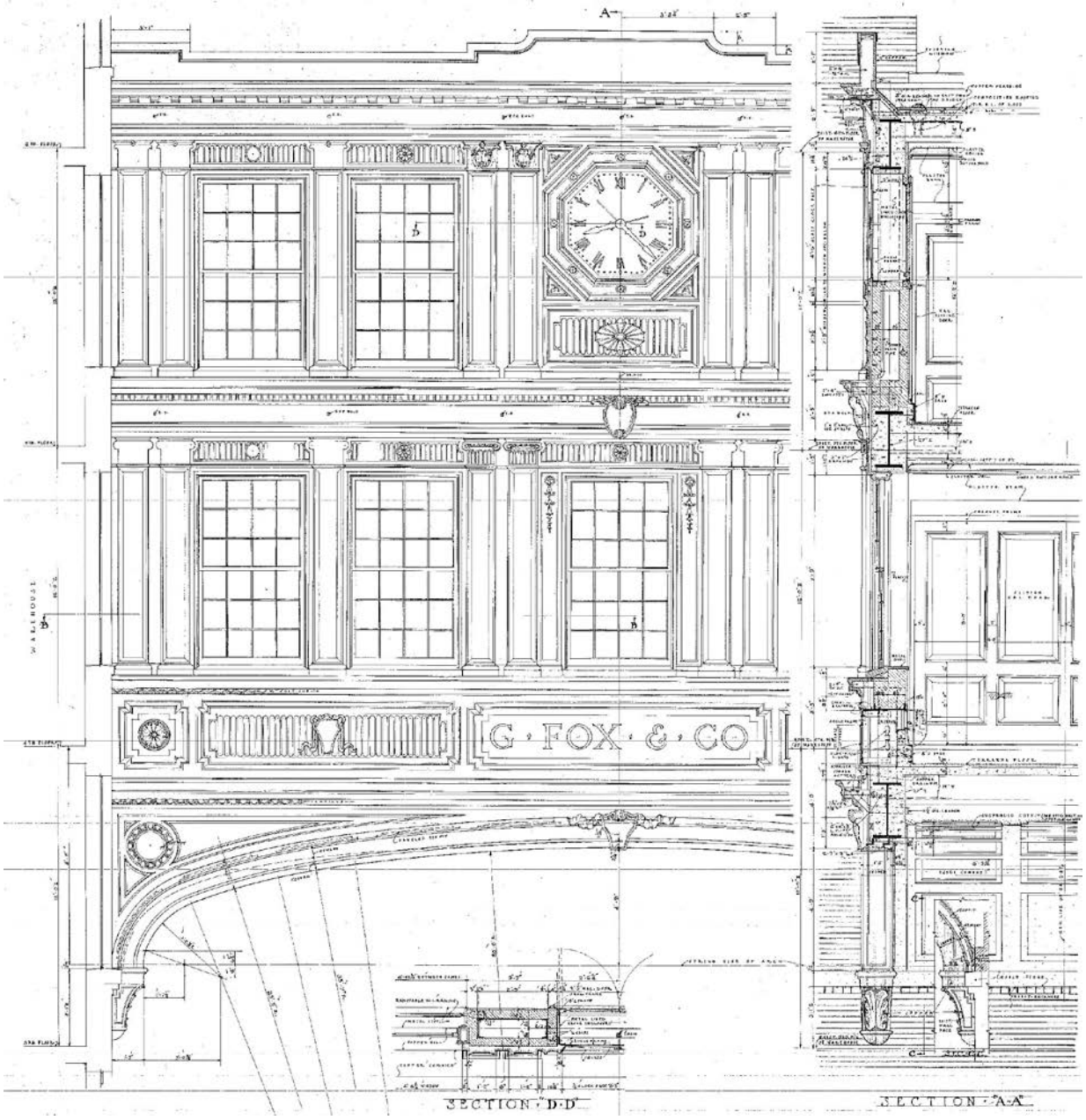


Figure 9. "Connecting Bridge for G. Fox & Co. Inc. Hartford Conn." By Abbot Merkt & Co. Inc. Engineers & Architects, 175 Fifth Ave, New York, April 18, 1930. Plans stamped "Received" by the Building Department May 7, 1930, found on the Hartford GIS scanned document viewer, depict the bridge design and construction and indicate it was built in 1930 rather than 1918 as indicated by the National Historic District Nomination. The above sections convey the level of detail in the bridge design and the connection of the bridge to the Warehouse Building.The complete drawing set is included as attachment 6.

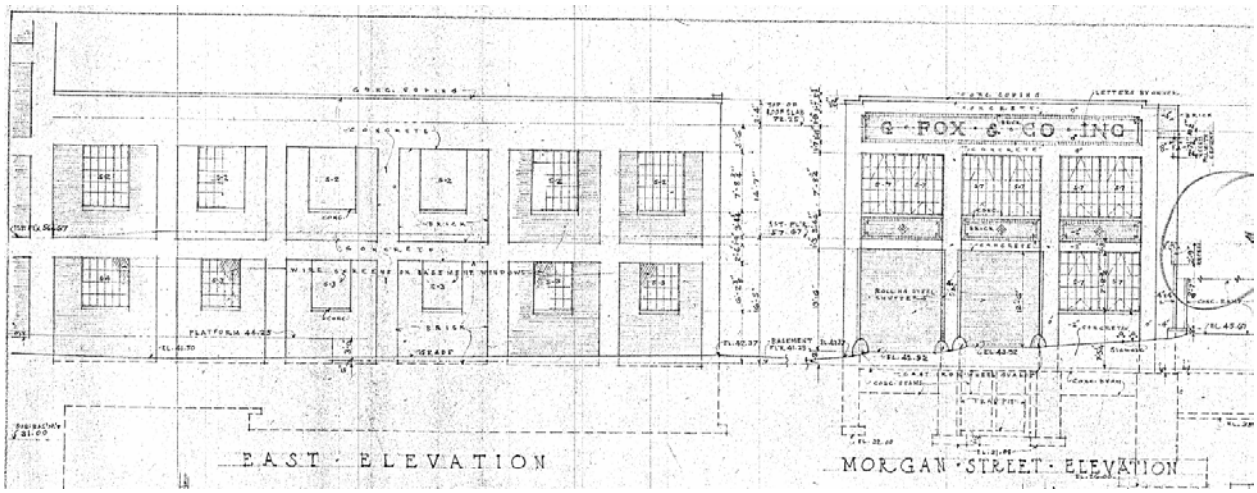

Figure 10. Elevations from "Revised Plans - Morgan Street Extension - G. Fox & Co. Inc. Hartford, Conn." By Abbot Merkt & Co. Inc. Engineers & Architects, 175 Fifth Ave, New York, May 20, 1930. Stamped "Received" by the Building Department July 1930. Seven pages of drawings, found in the Hartford GIS scanned document viewer under the address 36 Talcott Street, depict the architectural, structural, and utility plans for the 1930 addition on the north side of the original structure. This portion of the structure is not included in the district and none of the signage or original windows remain.

**COMMENTS RECEIVED** (None received as of November 10, 2020)

**ANALYSIS**

The existing Warehouse Building received a "Notice Violation/Emergency and Order to Abate" in March 2012 (Attachment 1) due to lack of maintenance including exposed rebar, crumbling concrete, broken sprinkler pipe on 2nd floor, and a railing at the entrance not meeting code. The building has been vacant since 2014 and no major maintenance has been done since that time.

Manafort Brother's Inc. and DESMAN Associates were hired in 2015 to estimate the costs associated with removing the top 3 stories of the building, which were used as office space, converting the roof level to provide additional parking, repairing the remaining portions of the structure, adding lighting, and making exterior improvements. DESMAN sited the challenges of not having construction or as built drawings of the structures as hinderance to a thorough estimate. Construction documents for the 1930 structure and 1986 garage alterations are available on Hartford's Scanned Document Viewer. A conceptual estimated of the required work by Manafort Brothers came to $19,086,793 and another estimate by DESMAN totaled $23,100,120 (Attachment 1).

The 1918 portion of the Warehouse Building and Neo-Classical Style bridge are included in the Department Store National Historic District. Therefore, another review was recently completed which looked at the cost of restoring only the 1918 portion of the building. In the report, Walker Consultants assessed several past reports, "Parking Layout Drawings" from 1999, concrete core sample analysis, and conducted a visual assessment of the structure (Attachment 3). They found the exterior of the building is largely intact but may need repairs or replacement at corners where cracking is visible and overall, the structure has suffered from exposure to the elements, lacking adequate drainage, high chloride concentrations in the concrete which induce the corrosion, and other deterioration from lack of waterproofing and repairs. The columns are believed to be in reasonable condition despite surface deterioration. Overall, this report also determined that extensive repairs and alterations are required to slow deterioration of the structure and meet present day code requirements for safe use as a parking garage. The report states the work required over the next several years to repair and stabilize the structure would cost $22,721,000 if implemented in phases.

It does not appear that any of the above mentioned reports included the review of the demolition or construction plans from 1985 and 1986, which can be found in the Hartford GIS Scanned Document Viewer at the address point 36 Talcott Street, and illustrate the conversion of the lower floors of the 1918 Warehouse Building to a parking garage. One of the revised drawing set submissions, dated 1986, is included with this report (Attachment 7). According to the drawings, alteration at that time included the removal of windows, demolition of portions of existing floors, and the installation of vehicle ramps.

The renovation of the 1918 structure into a parking garage was an unfortunate conversion, as the reports provided with this application have deemed cost of repairs to the structure exceed its value as a parking garage. A less intensive use, such as apartments, studio, or office space, may have been viable but were not in demand at the time. The ramped concrete floors now make the conversion to these other uses much less feasible or cost effective. No proposal for an alternate use has been presented at this time and no mention was made of the Historic Preservation funds available to support the cost of renovation of a contributing Structure to a National Historic District.

Per an email from LAZ Parking on October 29, 2020, the ownership team has deemed the full removal and restoration of the two-story Neo-Classical Style bridge too expensive to pursue. The initial cost of probe testing for the concrete and steel to determine the structural integrity is estimated at $50,000-$75,000. Per the email, LAZ Parking has concluded that "full removal and preservation of the bridge was not economically viable. However, we are committed to trying to save and restore the most significant and recognizable features of the bridge – it's copper cladding, windows, and clock."

Laz Parking is working with Building Conservation Associates (BCA) on a study of the bridge, but it was not complete or included with the application at this time. The scope of work described in BCA's proposal (Attachment 8), includes "technical recommendations for how the salvaged components should be removed, catalogued, documented, disassembled, labeled, protected, crated, and stored." The removal and storage of this unique architectural feature does not present a predictable future for it within the city fabric and it will likely remain in storage for the foreseeable future if an alternative plan is not addressed at this time. As seen in the above historic photographs (Figures 3,6,7) this bridge has been an iconic architectural element of Talcott Street since the 1930's, as well as reminder of the cultural history associated with the G. Fox. & Co. department store. Therefore, the options for restoring the bridge in place should be carefully examined and presented prior to considering other alternatives. If the bridge the is not structurally sound and deconstruction is required, staff recommends the historically significant bridge elements be removed, labeled, and temporarily stored while a new bridge framework and garage are constructed. The historic bridge façade elements should then be reinstalled to complete the restoration. Long term storage or the incorporation of characteristic elements of the bridge into a future building on the property should be a last resort.

The building on the south side of Talcott Street, which was originally the G. Fox. & Co. Store building, is connected to the Warehouse Building by the two pedestrian bridges. If the entire building and bridges at 36-70 Talcott Street are removed as proposed, additional work will be required to repair the remaining building at these connection points. The subject sections of the G. Fox Store building were constructed at different times and subsequently will require unique treatments to repair. The drawings for the Neo-Classical style bridge detail it's connection to the adjacent buildings. While additional elements may have been added over time to reinforce the bridge structure, the 1930 drawings contribute to a better understanding of the original bridge construction. These drawings, and additional field analysis, may reveal options for deconstructing the bridge to minimize damage to the bridge itself and the buildings it connects to. A proposal for the repair of the building following the bridge removal should be made available prior to the bridge removal. The newer bridge to the east appears to be a primarily concrete structure and will require a very different approach for removal. The removal of this second bridge will require repairs to the Art-Deco addition of the G. Fox Store building.

Staff believes that the provided documents show the rehabilitation of the entire structure at 36-70 Talcott, known as Talcott Plaza, or the 1918 portion of the building, is not economically feasible for future use as a parking garage. Additional proposals for alternative uses, other than parking, and options for partial demolition should be vetted prior to approval of the demolition of the 1918 portion of the structure. Staff believes that insufficient information was provided on the repair and treatment of the adjacent G. Fox Store Building following the proposed removal of the bridges that connect to it and that options for restoration or rehabilitation of the irreplaceable Neo-Classical Style bridge should be presented to the Preservation Commission. The ownership of the bridge structures was not clarified in any received documentation, due to their location across the right of way and connection to 960 Main Street, the future of both bridges and any repair work required to the 960 Main Street Building should be in cooperation with the owner of that property. The current owner of 960 Main Street may desire the physical connection between the historic G. Fox Store building and the new garage, therefore further supporting the restoration or rehabilitation of the historic neoclassical style pedestrian bridge. The costs associated with the repairs required to the remaining buildings, if one or both of the pedestrian bridges are removed, and agreements with the adjacent property owner, should be considered when evaluating the feasibility of rehabilitation compared to demolition and reconstruction.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends tabling this application until further explanation and information is provided on the following items:

1. Options for restoring the Neo-Classical Style pedestrian bridge in-place or removing the façade to replace the bridge structure and reinstalling the copper cladding, clock face, and windows if removal is required, should be presented along with the estimated costs associated with each alternative.
2. Strategies and plans for demolition to minimize damage to the adjacent structures during the removal of the two pedestrian bridge structures, if removal is required.
3. The proposed design and treatment for the remaining structure at 950-960 Main, the original G. Fox Store building, where the bridges, that currently connect it to 36-70 Talcott Street, will be removed.
4. Full cost estimates for the proposed demolition/removal of all structures on the parcel and estimates for rehabilitation of the Store Building where bridges were removed so that the full costs can be assessed against the costs for rehabilitation of the Warehouse Building and bridge.
5. A letter from the property owners at 950 and 960 Main Street on their preferred action regarding the bridges connected to their building.
6. Design alternatives for the proposed parking garage on the property following the partial or complete demolition of the existing structures.

**A draft resolution follows.**

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Application, narrative, & 2015 rehabilitation plan – provided by Applicant
2. Photos of the Neo-Classical Style Bridge – provided by Applicant
3. "Letter Report for One Talcott Plaza Parking Garage Condition Assessment," 2019 Walker Consultants – provided by Applicant
4. Email from LAZ Parking to Planning and Zoning Division dated, October 29, 2020.
5. Additional Photographs taken by Staff, Nov. 2020.
6. "Connecting Bridge for G. Fox & Co. Inc. Hartford Conn." By Abbot Merkt & Co. Inc. Engineers & Architects, 175 Fifth Ave, New York, April 18, 1930. Plans stamped "Received" by the Building Department May 7.
7. "Talcott Plaza" drawing set by Thomas Munroe Nicholes, AIA, & Associates, P.A. and Hallisey Engineering Associates. Printed April 23, 1986. Drawings depicting the conversion of the 1918 Warehouse Building to a parking garage and other renovations.
8. Pages from BCA's Proposal, including their scope of work.

**REVIEWED,**

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Aimee Chambers, Director

**CITY OF HARTFORD**
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION**
**36-70 TALCOTT STREET**
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROPOSAL**

**Whereas,** The City of Hartford Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the proposal to demolish the existing structures at 36-70 Talcott Street, historically known as the G Fox Warehouse Building, and removed the connected pedestrian bridges; and

**Whereas,** The property is located in the Department Store National Historic District; and

**Whereas,** The site includes an 8-story masonry and concrete building constructed as a warehouse in 1918 for the department store G. Fox. & Co. and is encompassed by a 4-story addition constructed in 1930 with additional floors on Market Street; and

**Whereas,** The original 1918 building's remaining architectural detail is the a corbelled cornice with simple parapet visible from Talcott Street. The upper floors were renovated for office use, the original windows have been replace, and the lower floors were significantly altered and converted to parking garage use around 1986.

**Whereas,** The Warehouse is connected to the original G. Fox. Store Building by two pedestrian bridges over Talcott Street. The Western most bridge is a two-story contributing structure to the Historic District and was constructed in the Neo-Classical style with copper-clad paneled pilasters, clock face on second story, cornice with modillions and stepped parapet, and 12-over-12 windows. Drawings depicting the bridge are dated to 1930.

**Whereas,** Both the Bridge and original Warehouse building have been vacant since 2012 or 2014 and exposure to weather and lack of maintenance has led to significant deterioration and need for repair.

**Whereas,** In 2015, estimates by Manafort Brothers and DESMAN Associates, for the removal of the top 3 stories of the building, conversion of the roof level to additional parking, repairing the remaining portions of the structure, adding lighting, and making exterior improvements totaled $19,086,793 and $23,100,120 respectively.

**Whereas,** An estimate by Walker Consultants, dated June 19, 2019, concludes the repairs and maintenance required for the 1918 portion of the structure come to $22,721,000, if carried out over a 5-year period.

**Whereas,** The applicant proposes to demolish the existing 1918 and 1930 structures and remove the pedestrian bridges connecting to the Historic G. Fox. Store Building across Talcott Street; and

**Whereas,** The applicant believes the full removal and preservation of the bridge is not economically viable but is committed to trying to save and restore the copper cladding, windows, and clock from the bridge; and

**Whereas,** Despite the need for repairs and maintenance, the historic pedestrian bridge is a defining element of the historic district.

**Whereas,** The proposed demolition is not consistent with the City's Historic Design Principles;

Now therefore Be It

**Resolved,** The City of Hartford Historic Preservation Commission hereby tables the proposed work until further explanation and information is provided on the following items:

1. Options for restoring the Neo-Classical Style pedestrian bridge in-place or removing the façade to replace the bridge structure and reinstalling the copper cladding, clock face, and windows if removal is required, should be presented along with the estimated costs associated with each alternative.
2. Strategies and plans for demolition to minimize damage to the adjacent structures during the removal of the two pedestrian bridge structures, if removal is required.
3. The proposed design and treatment for the remaining structure at 950-960 Main, the original G. Fox Store building, where the bridges, that currently connect it to 36-70 Talcott Street, will be removed.
4. Full cost estimates for the proposed demolition/removal of all structures on the parcel and estimates for rehabilitation of the Store Building where bridges were removed so that the full costs can be assessed against the costs for rehabilitation of the Warehouse Building and bridge.
5. A letter from the property owners at 950 and 960 Main Street on their preferred action regarding the bridges connected to their building.
6. Design alternatives for the proposed parking garage on the property following the partial or complete demolition of the existing structures.

Be It Further,

**Resolved,** This 18th day of November 2020.