Coburn building gets a reprieve

Preservation officials suggest nomination for historic places register

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LAFAYETTE - A turn-of-the-century building set to be demolished by the state Department of Transportation and Development has been given a reprieve following a recommendation that the structure be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places.

DOTD will hold off tearing down the “Coburn’s building” in downtown Lafayette pending review of the recommendation from state historic preservation officials that the building be put on the National Register, DOTD spokesman Rodney Mallett said Friday.

DOTD owns the building and had been planning to raze it to make way for a planned Interstate 49 interchange in downtown Lafayette, but the Downtown Development Authority and others have pushed to spare the historic structure, which sits on the block bounded by Third, Grant, Second and Cypress streets.

The building, believed to have been built either in the late 1800s or early 1900s, served for decades as the home for Merchants’ Grocer Co., a wholesaler once considered a significant regional business.

It last served as home for Coburn Supply Co. - a plumbing, heating and air conditioning business - and is one of the oldest surviving buildings in downtown Lafayette.

Preservation staff with the state Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism - See COBURN, page 2B
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Toured the building on Monday and have recommended the structure be nominated for the National Register based on its age and historical significance, said CRT spokesman Jacques Berry.

The National Park Service would make the ultimate decision on whether the building is worthy for the National Register, but CRT's recommendation could set in place a review of the design for the I-49 interchange planned for that area of downtown.

Guidelines for federal road projects call for a consideration of how projects will impact historic structures.

Berry said there will be no attempts to force DOTD to do anything, but the agency should at least consider the new information about the building's historical importance.

"Before you (DOTD) go and do something, we want to let you know any potential issues you may run into, and this is a big one," Berry said. "It doesn't preclude you from tearing down the building, but it does throw up a bunch of additional steps."

DOTD officials had initially said there were no plans to reconsider the building's historical status, nothing it had already been determined ineligible for a listing on the National Register during a study done years ago when the route was being mapped out for I-49 through Lafayette.

Berry said the early historic structures assessment for I-49, which involved some 1,800 buildings, was a cursory survey and should not be relied upon as the final word.

Mallett said Friday that although the demolition is on hold for now, no final decision has been made on its fate, but DOTD will follow whatever process is laid out in federal and state guidelines.

"We will get the official recommendation from them (CRT), and see where we go next," he said.

Berry said CRT preservation staff informed officials with DOTD and the Federal Highway Administration by phone on Thursday of the recommendation that the building be nominated for the National Register.

CRT plans to follow up with a formal letter outlining the preservation staff's reasoning for that recommendation.

Opponents of tearing the building had questioned why DOTD could not hold off, considering there is no secure funding for I-49 through Lafayette — a project estimated at more the $700 million — and because the design of the interchange planned for the area where the building now sits is still subject to change.

A crane is parked Friday in front of the former Coburns' building at the corner of West Second and Garfield streets in Lafayette.