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JAMAICA PLAIN

City to keep eye on vacant Centre Street building's progress

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The progress to rebuild and reoccupy 615-619 Centre Street in Jamaica Plain has been moving at a "snail's pace," according to city officials.

(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Stalled construction at a Centre Street commercial building has progressed

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enough to avoid legal action threatened by the city, for now, but officials will continue to monitor the work, which they said is moving at a "snail's pace."

In early August, Mayor Thomas Menino [told the Jamaica Plain Gazette](#) the city would "throw the book" at the site's owners, the Stamatatos family, if "significant progress" on the property was not made by September 1. The building has remained vacant, partially boarded and under construction since its owners were approved to renovate it 17 months ago.

Stamatatos Property Management could not be reached for comment Thursday.

"The workers are showing up, sometimes sporadically, but they are showing," said city inspectional services spokeswoman Lisa Timberlake in an interview Thursday, who added she did not know why the building's reconstruction has been progressing at a slow rate. On Thursday, "There were masons on site completing the walls in preparation of storefront installation. This seems to have been the status for the past month."

A city inspector assigned to the area has and will continue to visit the commercial building once or twice each week to ensure work is moving forward to reconstruct the building, which is wrapped in scaffolding and located at the corner of Centre Street and Grosvenor Road.

In the past, the inspector has seen no progress made on work in between visits, Timberlake said.

Local business owners interviewed Thursday had mixed opinions on the slow-moving construction.

"It's been a sore spot for many years especially on my side of Centre Street," said the owner of New Leaf Flores on Centre Street, Daniel López-Ospina, a 20-year Jamaica Plain resident. "It would be nice to have some new retail spaces around here," to draw more shoppers to area businesses.

"But now it looks like some work is being done so that's very exciting," he added.

The florist shop owner has been at the location for over three years, but not long enough to know how the vacancy at 615-619 Centre Street has affected consumer traffic there.

In 2006 the building's four businesses, including a member of the Stamatatos family's realty company, closed at the location after it was firebombed.

As for what the city should do: "I think they should put more pressure on it to

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get the work completed," López-Ospina said.

Paul Bryant, co-owner of the one-and-half-year old JP Comics and Games next door was less critical of the empty commercial property's progress.

"There's no one that doesn't want new business, but at the same time, in this economy especially, you can't just magically make money. I think it's simply that money is a lot tighter now," than when they first made plans to renovate, he said.

The Stamatou family owns multiple properties and businesses in Jamaica Plain and elsewhere in Boston.

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