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One of Sandusky's oldest, and most iconic buildings, will soon meet its demise. After more than an hour of discussion and deliberation during a Wednesday meeting, city landmark commission members — entrusted to preserve and maintain structurally significant architecture around town — agreed the Cooke Building must come crashing down.

They often referenced a report, recently completed by a city hired engineering firm, which detailed the Cooke Building's many shortcomings and even more safety hazards. Several problems exist with the building's foundation, floors, bearing walls, support beams, basement and masonry. In conclusion, this report labeled the Cooke Building, almost 170 years old, as "catastrophically failing" recommending it be demolished. Neglect over many decades caused the building to decay.

Rick and Meghan Hogrefe, the property owners since 2017, tried thinking of every conceivable, realistic option to execute in hopes of saving, and not destroying, such a storied structure. But, in short, none existed. "This is not us trying to do a few things, coming in and throwing our hands up," Rick said. "We tried. If we could save this, trust you and me, we would save this." So they applied, and received, a special demolition permit to begin razing the property. It's not yet known when demolition work could start. But it'll likely kick off in some fashion later this year. "Now we can formulate a concise plan," Meghan said. "We also have a chance to engage the community as well."

The permit came with several conditions, all of which the Hogrefes vowed to uphold. Among them: construct a new three-story building reaching 45 feet high, just like how the Cooke Building stands today.

Originally estimated at \$10 million, the Hogrefes — who also own The Marketplace at Cooke, the Schmidt Building and many other properties through their joint company, H2 Property Holdings — wanted to create a mixed-use space for entertainment, commercial and retail purposes at the Cooke Building. They'll keep the same ideas but place them all into a brand new building on this site.

Tim Berkey, a landmark commission member, called this vote "the biggest decision that has ever come before" the board. "Our purpose is to preserve, and we are being asked to take away," said Berkey, who, along with other members, determined safety outweighed all other factors. Berkey, however, wants both the Hogrefes, city administrators and his fellow board members to constantly communicate all progress with community members. "How can we partner with the owners and try to recreate some of the processes the city has had to engage people in a positive way and explain why we're doing this and where it's going?" Berkey said.

Berkey wants the city to host public forums, where people can both receive updates and suggest ideas regarding construction. "As soon as that projects starts, to take down the building, signage (should go) up there, visuals (should go) up there to show what's going to replace it," he added. "For the average person in the city, I think that connection is really important to try and make." Before ending his statement, Berkey affirmed his faith into the Hogrefes, believing they'll create something new and beautiful honoring the Cooke Building's past. "Not that the owners are going to take every suggestion, but I have watched that these owners do listen to people, do respect history — they have incorporated it into every one of their projects very well — and, so, I don't doubt for a minute they'll make sure that happens."