

This old house: Surrounded by new construction, heading for new location

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Out with the old, in with the new.

A house that was built before the Civil War is being pushed out of its neighborhood amid a construction boom of new apartments and hotels.

But it's being saved, which is good news to preservationists.

Tax records say the weathered house at 33 Woolfe St. was built in 1840. It has sat empty for several years as new buildings have gone up around it. A 10-story apartment complex is going up across the street. A 162-room hotel is being built a block away at Meeting and Woolfe streets.

“It really sums up so much of what is happening,” said Kris King, executive director the Preservation Society of Charleston, who took a photo of the house with the new apartments in the background last month.

The house was up on steel beams this week ready for transport. A contractor has agreed to move it to 14 Amherst St. and restore it, King said. He said the land was sold and the house given to somebody who would relocate it. Those plans couldn't immediately be confirmed with the contractor this week.

“It looks a lot worse than it is,” King said of the two-story wooden residence. “The frame is so substantial. The materials were so high quality.”

The goal of any relocation is to keep the house as close as possible to the original neighborhood, he said. Amherst is several blocks east of Meeting Street, near East Bay Street.

Charleston County tax records say the house and a gravel parking lot next to it were sold Feb. 2 to Vanderking LLC of Greenwich, Conn., for \$22,500. The records don't list the acreage.

Vanderking is the same investment group that bought the nearby 37,000-square-foot former Morris Sokol furniture store at 510 King St. around the same time for \$22.5 million. Plans for that property have not been announced.

The redevelopment boom in that area of the city has been underway for several years. In 2013, for example, the 120-room Holiday Inn Charleston Historic Downtown opened just a few yards away at Meeting and Woolfe streets. It was the peninsula's first new full-service hotel in more than a decade.

A wave of more new hotels and apartments, such as Elan Midtown, quickly followed.

The Hyatt Place and Hyatt House hotels opened last year less than a block away on King between Woolfe and Spring streets.

Across from the lodgings, a 54-room inn is under construction at 583 King St. It's one of a half dozen buildings in that block of King between Cannon and Spring streets that are being renovated or rebuilt.

A historic building across the street from the soon-to-be-moved home has also been preserved. The Woolfe Street Playhouse occupies the old Meddin Bros. meat packing plant beside the new apartments. The warehouse was built in 1914, and the theater opened in 2012. That effort earned a 2015 Carolopolis Award from the Preservation Society.

Saving old house in downtown Charleston is black owner's dream

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The man who is moving [an old house on Woolfe Street](#) that's being displaced by development says he's doing it to make a statement.

"It was something that I really wanted to go into because it was something that's not done here by black folk," said Joseph Wicks, a retired Pittsburgh firefighter who owns the house at 33 Woolfe St. "None of the historic revitalization is ever targeted toward black folk."

Wicks, a black man, says he has seen African-Americans moved out of downtown neighborhoods by development as tourism has driven up home prices and made taxes unaffordable for most.

Wicks, 70, was a friend of Joe Sokol, who owned the house and Morris Sokol's — the former store nearby on King Street — before selling the properties for development. The house can't be torn down because it was built in 1840. Wicks said Sokol told him he could have it if he could move it somewhere else.

Wicks has owned a lot at 14 Amherst St. for about 15 years. He's seen that neighborhood moving from single-family homes to apartments in renovated houses. He plans to move the old house onto his lot as a vacation home for his eight children when they visit Charleston.

He's been waiting on SCE&G to set a date to lift the wires and cut the power so Carolina House Movers can get a crane in. Then he will have to cut the house in half to get under power lines along the way. The two halves will have to be lined up exactly after the move, and the house will be raised about 6 feet off the ground because of federal flood regulations.

Wicks said people ask him all the time why he doesn't just build a new house.

"I'm trying to make something happen that doesn't happen here," he said. "I could flip it, but then I'd be like everybody else. The town is so gentrified and has changed so much, there aren't many black folks left in Charleston."

All eight of Wicks' children have gone beyond high school, including a daughter who is working on her doctorate in history at the University of Maryland.

"The key to all of this is education," he said.