

# Old Town Hall to be placed into new hands

By Donna Porstner  
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STAMFORD — The city plans to transfer ownership of one of its most majestic landmarks, Old Town Hall, to a government-controlled board.

The Old Town Hall Redevelopment Agency would oversee the vacant building's long-awaited renaissance as offices for the company that owns the Lord & Taylor department store chain.

The city must legally transfer ownership of the property to a limited liability corporation to secure financing needed to complete renovations, said city Rep. Harry Day, R-13, who is chairman of the Board of Representatives' Land Use Committee and is one of the redevelopment agency's seven members.

A public hearing on the transfer is planned for Oct. 17 at the Stamford Government Center.

The agency plans to raise \$6 million toward \$16 million in planned renovations by selling tax credits to investors.

Rent, which is \$400,000 annually for the first 10 years, will generate another \$4 million.

In addition, the state is providing \$4 million, and the city \$2 million.

The renovations will include a glass-enclosed addition on the Bank Street side of the 100-year-old Beaux Arts-Style building at 175 Atlantic St.

"It's still a municipally-controlled agency," Day said after

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a meeting last night where the transfer of ownership was discussed. "OTHRA is designed to reflect the will of the municipal government of Stamford, so in no sense is the city of Stamford losing control over the future of Old Town Hall with this transaction."

The Board of Representatives last year created the agency to oversee redevelopment of the property. Its seven members include two city legislators, the mayor or his designee, a member of the Board of Finance, a representative of the Urban Redevelopment Commission, a member of the Downtown Special Services District and one community representative.

Last month, the city reached

an agreement with National Realty and Development Corp., a real estate development and retail company that owns the Lord & Taylor and Linens & Things retail chains, to move 80 employees into the building in 2009.

The city would retain the lobby and central grand staircase for public use, such as art displays and history exhibits.

In addition to voting on the transfer of ownership at its November meeting, the Board of Representatives also is expected to agree to lease 74 parking spaces in the Bell Street Garage and six metered parking spaces of Bank Street to the agency. As part of the National Realty deal, the agency will, in turn, sublease the spaces to the tenant.

Old Town Hall was the center

of city government from 1907 until 1961, when Mayor J. Walter Kennedy's office moved to the Municipal Office Building at 429 Atlantic St. Some city government offices remained at Old Town Hall until the mid-1980s, when city offices moved into the Stamford Government Center.

For the last 20 years, Old Town Hall has been vacant, though its stately front plaza with its view of the clock tower is still occasionally used as a backdrop for political announcements.

The city marked the end of the first phase of the Old Town Hall restoration project — \$2.5 million in exterior repairs — in December by dedicating the newly rebuilt front plaza to former mayor and town clerk Louis Clapes.