Reviewed for Code Compliance
Inspections Division
Approved with Conditions

Maine Charitable Mechanic Association
519 Congress Street, Portland , Maine

Narrative for change of use and building permit application Date: 02/02/15

History

Mechanics Hall , an historic building was built in 1859 and is located at 519 Congress Street. It is listed on the National Historic Registry. It has had an interesting past from serving as an entertainment venue, ballroom dancing and events to serving as Portland's city hall after the 1866 fire. Further it has served as a way station for civil war troops needing a billet before shipping out.

Historic and existing uses

Contained within the 20,442 sf 5 story granite and brick building is the 8th oldest member library in the nation. It also contains 2 areas suitable for public assembly as a community hall: the "ballroom" located on the third floor containing approximately 3000 sf, and the " classroom" (850 sf) located on the second floor.

The building is fully sprinkled with a fire alarm system. It has a fire escape that services the second and third floors as well as a 1950's vintage elevator. Most recently the ballroom has served as a venue for member events that are not open to the public. Prior to that it served as a photography studio and artist studio. Prior to that it served as community hall for dances, lectures maker fairs and other exhibitions. The classroom currently serves as an art gallery and venue for first Friday events. The second floor also contains an office rented to the Bible Society. The first floor contains 2 retail spaces.

Goal

The goal of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association (MCMA) is to obtain a public assembly permit as a community hall in order to enhance its revenue stream. Thus allowing the MCMA to address many differed maintenance issues, as well as establishing a proper maintenance program. A public assembly permit for a community hall will allow expanded functionality of the building by offering the building as a venue for many different uses: theater, lectures, music performances, classroom, workshops, fairs and other similar uses.

Identification of steps to meet the Goal

In order to meet the requirements necessary for a public assembly permit, the MCMA engaged Mark Cummings of Fire Risk Management Inc. of Bath, Maine who conducted a thorough evaluation of the facility. A copy of his report is attached. His analysis recommended several upgrades or changes to the building in order to meet the life safety codes to obtain a public assembly permit, which are:

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1. Install automatic door closers on all doors open to the main stairwa part of the buildings means of egress
2. Secure all transoms in the closed position in doorways opening to tl stairway
3. Verify the age of the installed sprinklers
4. Upgrade the alarm/notification system to be fully compliant with NFPA 72
5. Install proper exit signage throughout the building and install proper emergency lighting in all means of egress areas.

The report was submitted to Captain Chris Pirone and John Martel of the Fire Department for their consideration and comments. They indicated that if the recommendations proposed by Mark Cummings were implemented they would accept the proposal provided that the fire escape was load tested. Subsequent conversations with the Fire Department resulted in the indication that if the Cummings recommendations were implemented and a plan of action addressing the fire escape load test were submitted as part of the application, the Fire Department would not oppose the granting of a 6 month provisional occupancy permit limited to 80 occupants for the ballroom, provided the fire escape was load tested within 6 months. Once the fire escape was successfully load tested ,the occupant load for the ballroom would increase to 158 occupants., and provided that there were no other building code issues that would be identified by inspections and plan review.

Once these upgrades listed above are implemented a permanent public assembly permit as a community hall for the classroom is in order. The occupant load for the classroom will be 49 occupants, regardless of any fire escape load testing. (The room is not served by the fire escape). And therefore will have a permanent public assembly permit upon the initial approval

Actions undertaken by the MCMA

In order to implement the life safety code upgrades:

- The MCMA contacted **Cunningham Security,** its existing vendor to provide a quote to meet the requirements set forth by Mark Cummings which included upgrading the panel, replacing all strobes/horns and adding horns/strobes in the first floor retail spaces as well as other locations. Recent discussions with Mike Major of Cunningham resulted in the transmission of PDF copies of the building plans which Cunningham Security will use to secure permits for the fire alarm upgrades in the next few weeks.
- The MCA has also contacted a **licensed electrician** to install appropriately placed exit signs and emergency lighting.
- **Lock Stock and Barrel** has provided a quote for automatic door closers.
- **Sprinkler Systems of Maine** has indicated that the age of the heads is compliant with NFPA 25.they will be issuing a letter indicating compliance.

RESURGAM CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
Reviewed for Code Compliance
Inspections Division
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within the range required by the NFPA codes and referenced by M Cummings?

- In the near future, the door transoms will be permanently closed a
- Contacted **Fire Escape Engineers** of Somerville, Ma for an esti cost of an inspection of the fire escape.

Steps in process for the Public Assembly permit

The MCMA is engaged in a fundraising campaign to meet the financial obligations to complete the upgrades. To date it has raised sufficient funds to:

- upgrade the alarm system
- install emergency lights and exit signs
- install door closers
- verify the age of the sprinkler heads
- close the transom windows
- maintain that all non essential doors are closed

These items will be addressed as soon as a building permit and change of use application is granted, hopefully within the next month.

Plan of Action regarding the Fire escape

The plan of action regarding the fire escape inspection and testing, will be addressed within 6 months of the issuance of the public assembly permit. In the event the fire escape is not successfully load tested within that time frame, the public assembly permit would be suspended for the ballroom until such time as the fire escape is tested. The pubic assembly permit which also includes the classroom would not be affected by the suspension of the permit for the ballroom.

A copy of the plans is attached. The building is a brick and granite structure.
The floor joists are 3x12 16" oc.
The present uses of the building are

- The (2) first floor spaces are retail with Encore a vintage clothing store and Art Mart an art supply store.
- The second floor houses the Bible Society of Maine (394 sf); the MCMA Classroom (850 sf) and Library, and boardroom (375sf) and a common bathroom (25sf).
- The third floor contains 2 artist studios totaling (1038 sf), and 2 bathrooms, one of which is 43 sf the other (25 sf), the ballroom (3000 sf) a bathroom and a storage room of (200sf)

RESURGAM CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
Reviewed for Code Compliance
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- The fourth floor (2310 sf) which is a mezzanine to the ballr 2 rooms that were formerly a womens and mens coat room for musicians, and a non functional kitchen.
- Finally is the attic (2503 sf) also known as the monitor.. Th fifth floors have a single means of egress and are not used at this time other than for storage.

The **scope of work** in addition to the aforementioned life safety code upgrades is the removal of the studio walls as noted on the plan, and the conversion of the other studio into a staging area for use by occupants or performers of the ballroom. The bathroom will also be accessible through this room. This will afford the ballroom with 3 bathrooms one on the second floor and 2 on the third floor.

The fourth floor or mezzanine has a bacony for musiciuans performing for the ballroom. The other rooms will be storage unless the planning department is of the opinion that they can be rented , If they are available as rentals then automatic door closers will be installed.