

# Building collapse crushes plans

## City carries out demolition

By GEORGIA PABST

[gpabst@journalsentinel.com](mailto:gpabst@journalsentinel.com)

*Posted: June 9, 2008*

The environmental remediation that included the removal of lead paint and asbestos had just been completed as part of the redevelopment of the two Acapulco buildings that collapsed at S. 6th St. and W. National Ave.

Tony Baez, executive director of the Council for the Spanish Speaking, said the group purchased those structures in January for \$350,000.

For decades, the buildings were a popular gathering spot for Mexican music and dancing, weddings, *quinceñeras* and other celebrations large and small.

Baez said his group, known commonly as the Spanish Center, planned to gut the buildings, keep the arched façade and create a center for community and business conferences, workshops and other events.

But when torrential rain and thunderous storms ripped through the area Saturday, a back wall of the building collapsed, with bricks falling on 6th St. City building officials issued an emergency demolition order because of the instability of the building, said Todd Weiler, a spokesman for the Department of Neighborhood Services.

By Sunday evening, the corner building had been leveled, with only rubble and bricks remaining.

The cause of the collapse hasn't been identified.

The Fire Department received a cellular phone call at 6:10 p.m. Saturday reporting that the building was collapsing. The Heavy Urban Rescue Team, trained to deal with such incidents, arrived by 6:15 in the pouring rain, department spokeswoman Tiffany Wynn said.

It appeared that the second floor collapsed into the first, officials said.

For a time, 6th St. was blocked off. Fire officials said it was too early to say whether the weather was a factor.

According to city building inspection records, the Acapulco properties had no structural or building code violations in the past five years, and there were no open violations at the

time of the collapse. Problems noted in online city records include graffiti and an exit sign that wasn't lighted.

Weiler said that because the property had been vacant more than a year, it did not receive yearly fire or building inspections. Vacant buildings are inspected every three years.

Baez said the building was insured.

"It was a very old, damaged building before we got it," he said. "We're disappointed because we had all these plans. We wanted to create an anchor for business, the community and culture."

Architectural drawings for the renovations had been made, and a capital campaign was set for July, he said. Baez said that new construction would be more expensive, and that his agency still has to pay the mortgage on the property.

[Buy a link here](#)

From the June 10, 2008 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel  
Have an opinion on this story? [Write a letter to the editor](#).