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## Paramount roof-railings project could start in August

### Meanwhile, code-violation fines have topped \$38,000.

[FAVORITE](#)[VOTE \(0\)](#)By [Darrell Hofheinz](#)

Daily News Real Estate Writer

The Paramount Church has once again found that the devil is in the details regarding a long-delayed roof-railing project at its historic building on Sunset Avenue.

Months behind schedule, installation may finally begin by mid-August of new historically accurate railings at the vintage Paramount Building. The work will satisfy aesthetic mandates issued by town's Landmarks Preservation Commission, and stop safety-code fines that are accruing daily and have so far topped \$38,000.

Although the church, which owns the landmarked 1927 building at Sunset Avenue and North County Road, finished replacing the roof early this year, double-checking the design of the custom cast-aluminum railings and tweaking other details slowed the project, according to contractor Greg Batten and others involved.

"We sacrificed time for accuracy," said Batten, whose West Palm Beach company, Batten Construction, submitted the lowest bid for the roof-and-railings project.

The weeklong installation of nearly 400 linear feet of railings could begin eight to 10 weeks from now, Batten said, adding that a West Palm Beach fabricator has begun production of the intricate railings.

The Rev. Dwight Stevens, who leads the church, has been wrestling with the project since 2009. That's when town inspectors first labeled the building's deteriorated railings — which had, in turn, replaced architect Joseph Urban's original versions — a code violation. But the Landmarks Preservation Commission later ruled that any replacements had to replicate the originals designed in the 1920s by Urban for the former movie palace that today houses offices, retail shops and the church.

The matter was complicated by building codes mandating that the anchors for the new railings must meet windstorm-resistance standards, a requirement that necessitated replacing the building's roof.

The project was initially delayed because the church had trouble raising the necessary funds, with private donations to the nonprofit Preserve the Historic Paramount Fund totaling only \$55,000 as of last summer. Additional funding materialized last fall in the form of an innovative three-year, \$350,000 loan by Palm Beachers Jana and John Scarpa, who issued the church a mortgage on the building. Once the old railings were removed last fall, the roof was replaced in January.

In March, a meeting took place with project architect Eugene Lawrence, Landmarks Preservation Commission Chairman Ted Cooney, Stevens, Batten and others, including Planning Administrator John Lindgren. They reviewed the final production drawings of the railings to ensure that they matched the designs that had been approved by the landmarks board two years ago.

"We had taken the precaution of sending the shop drawings to the town for them to look at, although we weren't required to do that," Lawrence said. "I wanted to be absolutely sure" that the drawings were correct before the manufacturing process began.

"It took some time for (officials) to look at them," he added.

At the meeting, the participants agreed to minor changes to the design of the balustrades, and those have been subsequently incorporated into the design, Lawrence said.

Having the final drawings reviewed by the town was critical, Batten said.

"I would not start production until the shop drawings were approved," Batten said.

Lindgren said he appreciated the desire of those involved to make sure the final drawings reflected the landmarks commission's directives.

"Most of the professionals (who work in Palm Beach) are cautious," said Lindgren, who acts as a liaison with the landmarks commission. "Everybody gets the fact that there's a lot of scrutiny given to building projects here, especially those that involve landmarks."

Meanwhile, the town continues to assess \$100-a-day safety-code fines against the church, and as of the end of the day on Friday, they totaled \$38,100, according to Raychel Houston, code enforcement manager.

The Code Enforcement Board had set an August 2010 deadline for the railings to be replaced. When that didn't happen, the town began fining the church about \$3,000 a month, starting May 31, 2011. Those fines will continue until the code-violation case is resolved, Houston has said.

Once the railings are in place, the church will ask the town to waive the fines, said Palm Beach real estate attorney Leslie Evans, who put together the Scarpas' loan deal and has been working with the church on other aspects of the project.

Stevens, meanwhile, said he is appreciative of the community's support since the controversy began but is ready to put the matter behind him. He blames the delays on the difficulty he and his supporters initially had in raising funds for the project during the recession but adds that "town red tape" is also responsible.

"We've acted in good faith from Day 1," he said. "We were faced with what we believed was an unreasonable request from the town. We have complied as best as we have been able to."

Cooney did not return phone messages left for him seeking comment.

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