Burlington’s Most Endangered

Liisa Reimann Rivera

Elmwood Cemetery

Sadly, as previous installments of “Burlington’s Most Endangered” demonstrate, there are many properties in the Queen City that are threatened by neglect, inadequate maintenance, lack of funding, inappropriate development and even insensitive public policy. It’s not just houses that are at risk however, but also commercial and industrial buildings, garages, landscapes, monuments, parks and even cemeteries.

Our historic burying places are worthy of as much attention and care as our greatest architecture. They fill gaps in archival records, give community context, and speak to our cultural standards and ideologies. Preserving them isn’t so much about immortalizing the dead, it’s about understanding the journey which brought us to the time in which we stand—and helping us set the course for future phases, those which our children shall navigate.

Elmwood Cemetery, located on the corner of Elmwood Avenue and North Street, is home to a number of significant Burlingtonians, including Fanny Allen (second wife of Ethan Allen and mother to the other Fanny, the first New England woman to become a Catholic nun and whose name the hospital bears) and Zadock Thompson (a naturalist, professor and Episcopal priest who published a number of tomes of Vermont history in the early 1800s). Gideon King, Timothy Follet, and Levi Allen also rest here. Elmwood, which is thought to have been used for burials as early as 1794, is also home to some lesser known (and downright shady) characters from our past…but those are tales best left for future issue.

The cemetery, which has long been closed to the public in an effort to stall decay, suffers from a number of ailments common to all historic burial grounds: invasive plant species; tree roots causing movement of grave markers; biological growth; poor or non-existent marker foundations; unvaulted grave sites; stones of varying quality (those of poorer quality being more susceptible to cracking and deterioration from freeze-thaw cycles, pollution, etc.); hu-
man intervention; and lack of adequate funding for critical repairs and maintenance. Unfortunately, cemetery conservation is neither easy nor inexpensive. Fortunately, there are several organizations dedicated to cemetery preservation that can offer critical guidance, such as the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. Elmwood Cemetery is an important part of Queen City history, but without some much needed restorative care its treasures are at risk of being lost forever. For this reason, we are designating it as one of Burlington’s Most Endangered.
The real challenge when trying to design and implement successful infill projects is to look beyond the short term of our 20 to 40 year construction obsolescence. We need to think, build and develop projects like the generations before us did. Buildings that will be here in 100 years still serving the needs of our communities and enhancing our cultural heritage. Many of the so called historic buildings we continue to enjoy and use today were built with this in mind.

Too often buildings we see today, like the Bobbin Mill Apartments on Pine Street, are hitting that 30 year mark and are failing. Workers are giving that building a new wrap of vinyl siding and windows to replace the aluminum or vinyl siding and windows that have failed in its short life.

Another example is Flynn Avenue Cooperative Homes on Flynn Avenue. The envelope of that development is deteriorating almost faster than the owners can keep up with routine maintenance. Both projects are to be lauded for their mission of affordable and safe housing for every person but the real cost of “standard” construction practices is borne by all of us in the end.

Now as we look at the last five infill plans proposed or passed for development in Burlington; Q. Tees, Dolans Garage, Pearl Street Oral Surgeons, the Eagles Club, and even Saint Anthony’s. We see projects that are trying to meet varied community needs with the same prescription. All of them have one thing in common: maximize square footage at the least cost, for maximum profits. We can see this approach is only good for the short term and only good for shareholders in the case of for-profit companies.

All of these projects try in one way or another to stretch the existing ordinance to take advantage of every square foot of space and linear foot of height. They offer nearby or related projects as precedent for growing beyond the average of the neighborhoods that they

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**Shoe Horn Construction**

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**Siding and windows replaced after 30 years.**

**Cooperative Homes on Flynn Avenue in need of repairs.**

**Hilton Garden Inn filling the block between Main, Saint Paul, and Pine Streets.**
The Burlington City Council on February 18 voted down a proposal to eliminate all parking requirements in the “downtown parking district,” which includes the downtown and adjacent areas. Currently, the zoning ordinance requires one space per residential unit, though a waiver is available. Retail stores and restaurants already need no parking.

The Planning Commission passed the proposal in 2013, calling it “absolutely critical.” Not surprisingly, developers voiced strong support. However, a number of residents spoke against it, including several Preservation Burlington board members. Residents suggested that, since new residential units increase the need for parking or mass transit, it is only fair that developers bear a portion of such costs. Developers who choose not to build on-site parking should contribute to a transportation management fund to improve mass transit, improve pedestrian or bicycle access, build centralized parking, or maintain existing city parking garages. Residents pointed to a statement by Chapin Spencer, head of the Burlington Department of Public Works, that “we currently have $1 million worth of urgent capital improvements to city garages that we’re unable to make.” They also noted that national parking expert Jeffrey Tumlin, the keynote speaker at the City’s “parking summit” last fall, said that Burlington’s parking system is outdated and provided a long list of needed improvements. One was parking meters which make it easy to find available spaces and do not require coins. Mr. Tumlin specifically stated that in his opinion the minimum parking requirement should not be eliminated.

Developers, joined by Planning and Zoning Department Head David White, argued that there were already 3100 “underutilized” parking spaces in the downtown area, according to a Plan BTV Transportation Study. However, several residents pointed out that the study shows that the majority of such spaces are in private parking lots which are reserved for private use. The spaces are not available to the public. Mr. White did not suggest there was any plan to compel or persuade private owners to make them available.

Mr. White also told the council that the parking requirement was a serious drag on development, variously putting the cost of a single space at $30,000, $40,000, or $100,000. Finally, both Mr. White and Ernie Pomerleau, a prominent developer, said that eliminating the parking requirement would preserve “a walkable and pedestrian-friendly environment.” One resident remarked that this seemed “a marvelous coincidence of uncommon wording,” leading him to question Mr. White’s independence from the development community.

The proposal’s defeat does not end the parking discussion. The City Council returned the proposal to the Planning Commission with a request that it consider requiring a contribution to a transportation management fund in lieu of on-site parking. The Planning and Zoning staff has resisted the City Council’s request, stating that “[to] presuppose that an impact fee is an appropriate and effective funding tool for comprehensive parking and transportation infrastructure could turn out to be considerable waste of time, effort and money.” However, it has said it “will come back to the Council with a recommendation for how to proceed within the coming year.”

Meanwhile, the Chittenden Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) has funded a “Downtown Parking Initiative” involving CEDO, the Department of Public Works, and the Better Business Association, which will “completely redefine how we manage our parking assets in the downtown area,” in the words of David White. Like Mr. White, all of the organizations involved in the Initiative have favored eliminating downtown parking requirements in the past. Lending weight to the suspicion that the Initiative’s conclusion is foregone, Mr. White has said: “we believe this effort will make it possible for us to eliminate the requirement for on-site parking in the downtown area.” Finally, the Department of Public Works also has funding from the CCRPC to look at the city’s residential parking situation. An effort by developers, the Planning Commission, and Department of Planning and Zoning to decrease off-street parking requirements in residential neighborhoods is expected soon.
During last year’s Mardi Gras Parade, as they stood freezing at the corner of Main and North Winooski, clamoring for beads and whoopie pies, my kids and I talked about how much warmer and more fun it would be on one of the floats, throwing the trinkets rather than begging for them.

With that conversation in mind, I proposed at PB’s board retreat in December that PB for the first time put together a float for the annual parade sponsored by the Magic Hat Brewing Company. My fellow board members are creative, talented, hard-working, and fun, and, unlike me, they’re handy. I thought it would be a great opportunity for Preservation Burlington to get its message across to a different audience.

Despite some trepidation, the board voted to give it a shot. Perhaps no board member was more enthusiastic about the project than Emily Lee, who organized a brainstorming session and came up with the idea herself to spoof the controversial video for Miley Cyrus’s hit song “Wrecking Ball.” Recognizing that music is an important part of a Mardi Gras float, Lee saw a natural connection between the song and PB’s mission to prevent the demolition of historic buildings.

During February Ron Wanamaker lent a good portion of Wanamaker Restoration’s workshop to float construction. Jack Mentes built a platform on the back of Wanamaker Restoration’s truck and designed a scale model of the Follett House, which was constructed out of wood and cardboard. Construction was a group effort by members of PB’s board, members of their families, and a team of UVM historic preservation students led by PB board member Connie Kent.

While freezing cold, parade day, Saturday, March 1, was a blast! This year’s parade featured fifteen floats, including those of perennial participants like Seven Days, Magic Hat, and Price Chopper. After weeks of planning and preparation, the parade itself lasted less than half an hour. Shortly after the parade, PB received a letter from Magic Hat: “Congratulations to the Preservation Burlington team! Our official Mardi Gras float judges have spoken and your team has secured the coveted honor of Best Float Runner-Up! Thank you for the creativity, time and energy that no doubt went into making your float truly spectacular!”

Asked after the parade if being on the float was everything they thought it would be, my kids remarked that it was a lot more fun than being in the audience, but it wasn’t much warmer.

are squeezing into. In the case of Saint Anthony’s Church the developer is citing the steeple as the average height of the project. While an extreme example of literally stretching the limits, this illustrates the mentality of growth that neighborhoods are facing. In the case of the former Eagles Club, Champlain College plans to develop student housing, not dorms mind you, that will house 300 students and provide no parking for those 114 residential units. There will be parking, but it will be donated to the City so that the private developer can increase the height of the project by 20 feet, 2 floors higher than anything nearby, except an unfinished condominium tower that also dwarfs its immediate neighbors. Both projects claim to be in keeping with the original Hotel Vermont, a turn of the century brick building built on the urban corner of Main Street and Saint Paul Street that is now known as the Vermont House. The similarities end at the sheer size comparison. The Hotel Vermont is made to last 100 years, and has, as it continues to adapt and change to meet the housing needs of our dynamic culture. In that case the massing and materials are grand and provide a balanced anchor to City Hall Park an obvious urban landscape.

All six of the proposed projects stretch the limits of neighborhood norms without any of the long term benefits associated with our large historic buildings. They offer none of the adaptability, longevity of materials, or classicism that grand historic buildings do.

What they do offer is short term solutions for long term challenges and short term gains for the few while the many will pay the tab 30 years from now.
Behind the Green Marker

By Marge Allard

362 Saint Paul Street

Not far from the intersection of Saint Paul and Spruce Streets, set back from the eastern side of Saint Paul, sits a tidy row of three small homes. One of these, a quaint one and a half story brick structure in a vernacular, Greek Revival style, is 362 Saint Paul.

According to Burlington’s land records, the house was built in 1848 by William H. O’Brien, a cooper, who was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He was married to Sarah Jane Hartsinger originally of Alburgh, Vermont. His 1897 death certificate gives his age as 70 years 6 months. Over the next 30 years, the property changed hands between various members of the O’Brien family, who lost it to foreclosure in 1885. The property was returned to the O’Brien family two years later, where it remained until the turn of the century. In 1889, Eleanor (O’Brien) Arless, became the last member of the O’Brien family to own the house. Eleanor resided in Montreal with her husband, George Arless, a professional photographer, and therefore leased the property.

Eleanor had lost three brothers to the Civil War and was a strong supporter of the Grand Army of the Republic, becoming president of the Women’s Relief Corps, the GAR auxiliary, in Montreal. She was also an at large member of the Vermont chapter. In 1893 she made a beautiful Veteran’s Memorial quilt that is now the property of the McCord Museum in Montreal. The quilt is a log cabin pattern, embroidered with the names of New England veterans and their GAR posts.

William, who was employed as a clerk at Goodell Monuments, located at 112 Church Street, reportedly took home scraps of marble to make sidewalks around his house. Between 1923 and late 2012, the property had four additional owners.

Today, 362 Saint Paul Street is owned by Beverly Wool, a longtime resident of Burlington, interior decorator, and owner of Beverly Wool Interiors. A native Vermonter, Beverly has served as chair of the Burlington City Planning Commission and the city’s Design Review Board. As a Church Street Marketplace Commissioner, she selected the street furniture, paint colors and lighting that enhance the charm of the city’s famous downtown shopping street. Participants in this year’s Homes Tour will take delight in seeing what Bev has accomplished with the home she fondly referred to as her “diamond in the rough.”

The quilt is centered with portraits of Washington and Lincoln. In 2012 the quilt was part of a Civil War themed exhibit at the American Textile Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts. It is scheduled to travel to the Shelburne Museum in September as part of this exhibit.

In 1903, the home was occupied by William H. Tooles, and his wife, Mary.
Springtime is a time for growth, or in Burlington’s case, perhaps we should say “development.” Anyone who has read the local papers or watched the news knows that large-scale developments are proposed in a number of Burlington’s traditionally small-scale residential neighborhoods. Plus, step outside your home and new construction is everywhere. The common misconception is that historic preservation groups like Preservation Burlington are opposed to growth. That’s not true! We understand that a community needs to change to remain vibrant. We believe in smart growth—development that doesn’t sacrifice the well-being of local residents, preserves the character of our community, and exhibits quality craftsmanship and long-term sustainability. We see those characteristics in some of the changes happening around Burlington—but sadly not in all.

Speaking of change, you may have noticed that the PB Newsletter is now going by the name The Sentinel. Rather than something new, though, this is actually a return to the name originally used for our publication. The name pays homage to Burlington’s first newspaper, The Burlington Sentinel, published from 1810 to 1844.

As we look forward to the season ahead, I do want to mention an important event that happened back in February. Preservation Burlington was proud to present its annual historic preservation awards at a ceremony held at the Main Street Landing Performing Arts Center.

This year awards went to Mark Davidson and Kelly Kaeding-Davidson for the restoration work done on their commercial property at 161 North Street; the University of Vermont for returning “Englesby,” the institution’s presidential mansion at 112 South Williams Street, to its former glory; and two residential property winners—Scott Dillon and Kimberly Hayden for the transformation of their home at 24 Bayview Street; and their neighbor, Jan Blomstrann, for the meticulous work done on her home at 25 Bayview Street.

We also presented the Spirit of Preservation Award to Maureen Villemaire and Bernard Villemaire for the years of loving care they have shown their home at 40 Clarke Street, and a new award intended to acknowledge efforts to save Burlington’s historic outbuildings to Nancy Kirby for the restoration of her barn at 339 Colchester Avenue.

PB’s Ray O’Connor Award, which recognizes an individual’s or group’s contribution to the betterment of our community, was awarded to Melissa Parker and the Equity Task Force for their work behind the establishment of Burlington’s magnet schools. Again, we would like to congratulate all our winners!

PB will be sure to keep you busy over the coming months with our events and activities. You’ll want to make sure to get tickets to our Annual Homes Tour on Saturday, June 7! Also, Preservation Burlington is happy to be participating in the 2014 Vermont History Expo at the fairgrounds in Tunbridge, Vermont on June 21 and 22. This year we will also be offering an array of specialty walking tours—so be sure to wear your comfortable shoes and check out what we have to offer.
Meet the Board Member

Jack Mentes, a charter director of Preservation Burlington, has served the board on and off three times since its inception in 1998. He held the position of vice president and treasurer in the past, and is, once again, the current treasurer. In the beginning, town/gown and quality of life issues served as his motivation for forming an advocacy group with other like-minded Burlington residents. Eventually, Jack and his cohorts joined forces with residents concerned with the preservation of our historic structures, and Preservation Burlington was born!

Jack was born and raised in Connecticut where he was active in numerous associations, both fraternal and social. Jack, a salesman by trade, was quick to respond to groups that required help with fund raising. Over the years, Jack has helped organizations such as the United Way, March of Dimes, YMCA, and the local schools to raise countless dollars. He was always active in sports, both playing and coaching. He also officiated high school football games for 20 years.

Jack moved to Burlington in 1996 when he retired from a career in sales and marketing of directional advertising media. After retirement, while parlaying his forefathers’ building skills, he worked as a carpenter for several general contractors in the area and grew to appreciate the beauty of Burlington’s older housing stock. He was inspired so much that he undertook the 3-year task of converting an 1869 carriage house into a home for he and his wife. Now fully retired, his passion for architecture has not waned. His ongoing dilemma is: why are antique buildings not appreciated and treated the same as old jewelry, autos, musical instruments, etc.? “Demolition by neglect is an environmentally wasteful practice,” he derides. Besides acting as PB’s treasurer, he is also a member of the group’s Homes Tour and Development Committees. Jack also volunteers at The Chittenden County Food Shelf.

Jack resides in Burlington with his wife, Peggy. He has two children and two grandchildren.

PB Homes Tour

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this year’s Preservation Burlington historic preservation award for residential properties. Add to this mix Marc Jacobs’ Victorian at 260 South Union Street, a fine example of an owner-occupied apartment building, and the historic rooms of the Converse Home, Church Street’s oldest structure, and you are guaranteed a tour to remember!

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Vermont History Expo

Preservation Burlington is excited to be a part of the Vermont History Expo 2014! The Expo is down-home fun whether you are 8 or 88! Preservation Burlington’s exhibit will spotlight the spectacular wood carvings of Albert Whittekind. Whittekind came to Burlington to execute the carvings for the Billings Library and eventually made Chittenden County his permanent home. A number of Burlington’s structures, those grand and not-so grand, are ornamented by Whittekind’s work.

Over 150 history and heritage organizations offer fascinating exhibits sharing community history from all over the state. Artists, artisans, musicians, authors, crafters, and genealogists complete this history-filled heritage extravaganza!

Vermont History Expo
June 21 and 22
10:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Tunbridge, Vermont
For more info go to http://vermonthistorymonth.org/expo

Renovation or Restoration? Making the Best of Your Old House

Join Preservation Burlington for a talk by preservationist, licensed house inspector, and DIY expert Ron Tanner. Ron will offer a slide show that illustrates several projects he and his wife undertook as they restored an 1897 Baltimore brownstone—condemned property, which was a wrecked former frat house—and brought it back to its original Victorian splendor . . . and then some. Combining humor with history and his extensive knowledge of old houses, Ron will try to answer the question, Should you make your old house even “better” than it was originally? Ron and his wife run www.houselove.org, a DIY resource website with a national readership. Their how-to videos have been viewed by more than one million readers.

Walking Tours

Burlington’s fascinating history and alluring architecture come alive through guided walking tours. Our knowledgeable guides will entertain you with stories of the past and introduce you to Burlington’s diverse architectural styles. We offer a number of different types of tours and cover a variety of Burlington neighborhoods.

Downtown Burlington. Periodic Saturdays, June through October. Meet on Church Street in front of City Hall at 11:00 AM. Tours last approximately 1.25 hours. Exact dates will be listed on our website later this spring.

Old North End. On a Saturday in late-July we will tour Burlington’s most diverse neighborhood in conjunction with the Old North End Ramble.

Pine Street. Celebrate the commercial and industrial history of Burlington’s South End during Art Hop on Saturday, September 6.

Willard Street. Join us in August for a gorgeous tour through Burlington’s stately hill section and learn about the high-style architecture and influential Burlington residents of the Gilded Age.

Ravine Tour. This new and exciting tour will “uncover” Burlington’s former ravine. You will explore places where the ravine is still visible and hear remarkable stories about the gaping hole that once cut through downtown and the relentless challenges to keep it filled in.

Waterfront. Periodic Saturdays through October. Meet at the waterfront visitor’s center at the bottom of College Street at 1:00 PM. Tours last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. Exact dates will be listed on our website later this spring.

War of 1812. In honor of Burlington’s War of 1812 Bicentennial, we will tour several sites in Burlington that were involved in the war during the year of 1814.

Bicycle History Tour. Our popular fall bicycle history tour will introduce you to Burlington’s historic bicycle culture, stopping off at significant bicycle-related landmarks along the way.

Cemetery. In October we will stroll through one of Burlington’s historic cemeteries, investigating its history and the stories of several of its “residents” along the way.

Renovation or Restoration?
May 21, 2014
Time and place to be determined
Please check preservationburlington.org for more details

Walking Tours
Check our website for more details:
www.preservationburlington.org.
Email info@preservationburlington.org to arrange a tour.

Fee, unless otherwise noted:
$10 (non-PB members)
$5 (PB members and students)

We are more than happy to arrange a special tour for your school or community group.
Show your pride and buy a new Preservation Burlington T-Shirt!

PB’s logo on the front and motto, Looking to the Future with Respect for the Past on the back.

Only $15. Available in Forest Green unisex adult sizes S-XXL

Contact info@preservationburlington.org to order.

Historic Building Markers

Preservation Burlington Historic Markers are the perfect way to celebrate the age of your home!

The markers can be hung on the exterior or interior of your home.

Cost: $75 includes: basic research on your home, a marker, and one-year membership to Preservation Burlington.