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# Mass. preservation group seeks to save Notre Dame, Mount Carmel

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Preservation Massachusetts, the statewide historic preservation advocacy organization, has included Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Notre Dame des Canadiens churches on its biennial Most Endangered Historic Resources list.

“It’s very similar to what Preservation Worcester has done. It’s an opportunity to promote a little bit more advocacy regarding both churches,” said James W. Igoe, president of the organization and also a former executive director of Preservation Worcester.

The two churches, both of which are on the local Preservation Worcester Most Endangered Structures list and are currently under demolition delay, are two of seven entries on the list that were selected by a committee. Preservation Massachusetts notes on its website that the list is purely an advocacy effort; it is not legally binding and doesn't entitle funding or specific resources.

But compiled since 1993, fewer than 20 of the more than 140 historic sites designated as endangered since the list's inception have been lost, according to the organization.

Not that Mount Carmel and Notre Dame don't present significant challenges. Both are Catholic churches, which typically are large, architecturally ornate, and landmarks in their community, Mr. Igoe noted. He said that this might make them notable candidates for preservation, but in light of declining church attendance, the large, sumptuous buildings often require expensive maintenance or a costly conversion project.

The first option is the goal of the Mount Carmel Preservation Society, which is [spearheading a campaign](#) to preserve the building and to restore it so it can again be used to celebrate Mass. [The church closed May 1](#) after being deemed a safety risk because of structural damage. Over recent weeks, workers have been shoring up the structure so it doesn't collapse. The MCPS is raising money to reimburse the Diocese of Worcester's cost of rehabilitating the church and to sustain the church in the future, according to Mauro DePasquale, who is leading the campaign. So far it has about \$8,000 in cash and \$96,000 in pledges, Mr. DePasquale reported.

Preservationists hope Notre Dame, however, can be converted for another use. The diocese closed the church in 2007 and sold the building for \$875,000 to an arm of the Hanover Insurance Group, which is developing CitySquare. The developers plan to raze the building following the delay. [A new apartment development](#) is being developed near the church. A groundbreaking for a [168-room hotel, also adjacent to the church](#), is scheduled for Nov. 2.

Every other week, a group of interested architects, developers, preservationists and community members that calls itself Reimagine Notre Dame meets to try to find an alternative and economic use for the property, said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester.

But regardless of preservationists' ultimate goals for the properties, all those in favor of preservation said that the state group's listing should support their advocacy.

"It's an advocacy tool. There's no legal status that goes along with it," Ms. Packard said. "But it's kind of a wake-up call for owners of the building saying, not only are those buildings important for people in Worcester, but people think they have significance statewide."

And Mr. Igoe said a good preservationist doesn't give up hope.

“Yes they are difficult, we normally wouldn’t list a property if we thought it wasn’t going to be a challenge,” said Mr. Igoe. “But nevertheless, good preservationists are not deterred and are ready to work until (a property) is saved or up until the moment it is lost.”