

# Worcester's 'Most Endangered' buildings go from sacred to profane



The former Paris Cinema at 68 Franklin St., once the Capitol Theatre, closed for good in early 2006 after several years as a porn theater. It was originally built in 1925 as the Capitol Theatre. T&G File Photo/Rick Cinclair



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WORCESTER - Churches, theaters and even porches are among the structures on Preservation Worcester's annual Most Endangered Structures list for 2016, with a notable concentration of properties at risk in the city's downtown.

“In my tenure, there are more properties threatened with demolition than I recall, and I think part of that is due to the revitalization downtown,” said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester. “Some buildings are being revitalized and some are being threatened, so it is a double-edged sword.”

Since 1995, Preservation Worcester has annually released a list of the most endangered structures in the city. The structures - which may include residential, commercial, industrial or institutional buildings, bridges, monuments, parks, burial grounds or even entire neighborhoods or building elements - must have been built before 1965 and be significant for their historic, architectural and/or cultural contributions to the city’s landscape.

Structures may be threatened by neglect, demolition, change of use, or alteration.

This year’s list include 10 entries, some of which have appeared on the list before and which also run the gamut from, quite literally, the sacred (Notre Dame des Canadiens Church) to the profane (the Paris Cinema).

Ms. Packard said the list is a good way to draw attention to structures at risk of demolition. In the past, the list has prompted successful preservation of structures from street clocks to an entry on last year’s list, the Stearns Tavern.

The 2016 entries are:

**Capitol Theatre (Paris Cinema)**

66 Franklin St.

Previous list appearances: 2005, 2007

Originally opened in 1926 as an “atmospheric theatre,” where projected clouds and stars moved across the curved ceiling during performances “to give the impression that patrons were seated in an outdoor Spanish amphitheatre,” according to Preservation Worcester.

Later this atmosphere changed to become an adult theater, which was closed in January 2006. The owners have petitioned the Worcester Historical Commission to waive the city’s one-year demolition delay ordinance.

**Charles H. Bowker House**

3 Harvard Place

Previous list appearances: 2005, 2011, 2012, 2014

First occupied in 1874 by a local industrialist, the High Victorian Gothic style home suffered fire damage to its roof and interior, and the property owner has not attempted repairs.

**Hope Cemetery Barn**

119 Webster St.

Previous list appearance: 2006

Built in 1889, the Stick and Shingle-style barn is still used to store groundskeeping equipment and materials at the cemetery. Hopes that the city would preserve the building have not materialized, according to Preservation Worcester.

**Lothrop’s Opera House (Olympia Theater)**

17-27 Pleasant St.

First appearance on list

Opening in 1891, this is the oldest surviving theater in the city. The theater closed in 2007, but retailers operate out of the modified storefronts. The theater was included as a potential building to be demolished in the recently approved Worcester Redevelopment Authority Downtown Urban Revitalization Plan.

### **Notre Dame des Canadiens Roman Catholic Church**

5 Salem Square

Previous list appearance: 2009

Preservationists thought the 1929 Romanesque Revival church would be retained by developers of the CitySquare project, but the developers have filed plans to demolish the structure and plan to wait out the one-year demolition delay.

### **Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church**

26-28 Mulberry St.

First appearance on list

The 1928 church was closed May 1 because of safety concerns with the crumbling facade. A group of concerned parishioners, the Mount Carmel Preservation Society, hopes to raise money to repair and reopen the church, which is owned by the Diocese of Worcester.

### **Quinsigamond Fire House**

15 Blackstone River Road

Previous list appearances: 1995, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2015

One of the few remaining community buildings still standing from the heyday of Quinsigamond Village, the 1891-1892 Romanesque building has been neglected since closing in 1994. Bought by a private developer in 2013 for restoration, no work has been done and the property is back on the market.

### **Ripley's Block**

78-86 Pleasant St.

Previous list appearances: 2013

This is one of the few row houses remaining in Worcester, dating to the 1870s. Losing the building would "be extremely damaging to the historical character and dense urban appearance" of this section of Pleasant Street, according to Preservation Worcester.

### **Sheraton Apartment House**

111 Pleasant St.

Previous list appearance: 1997

Built circa 1926, the five-story Classical Revival apartment building has gradually fallen into disrepair.

### **Three-decker porches**

Citywide

First appearance on list

A key feature on a unique form of late 19th-century residential architecture throughout Worcester, the stacked porches on the front of three-deckers have often been removed or enclosed to form additional living space. This destroys unique architectural decoration and makes the buildings more generic and box-like, preservationists say.