

Worcester Telegram & Gazette
Tuesday, October 31, 2017

Churches, three-deckers on Worcester's Most Endangered list



The Helen Dodge Three-Decker at 570 Pleasant St. is on Preservation Worcester's 2017 list of Most Endangered Structures. [T&G Staff/Christine Peterson]

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Posted Oct 31, 2017 at 10:19 PM Updated Oct 31, 2017 at 10:24 PM

WORCESTER - Notre Dame des Canadiens and Our Lady of Mount Carmel churches, unsurprisingly, top Preservation Worcester's 2017 list of Most Endangered Structures. But this year's list also calls for some old-fashioned neighborhood involvement.

"The thing that's a little different this year is No. 10: Revitalize your neighborhood. If you see somebody in the neighborhood who needs a little help, offer to help," said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester.

“The fact is that many people would like to take care of their properties but aren’t able to either physically or financially, so the thought was, let’s have people reach out to your neighbor to help them out,” she said.

Since 1995, Preservation Worcester has released a list every year 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 or cultural contributions to the city’s landscape.

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

Photos: Worcester's Most Endangered Structures

Some of this year’s nominees have appeared on the list before.

“We never had so many buildings (on the list) threatened with demolition. It’s usually neglect or deferred maintenance rather than demolition,” said Ms. Packard. “I think it’s the double-edged sword with downtown revitalization and with so much going on that properties are more vulnerable to demolition as well.”

The organization also highlighted successes this year, naming seven structures that have been renovated to preserve their historic charm, or have been saved from the wrecking ball, or - in the case of gargoyles from the Chestnut Street Congregational Church - have been returned safely to town.

Photos: Worcester's Most Endangered Structures

- Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, 26-28 Mulberry St. - The circa-1928 church was closed in May 2016 because of safety concerns with the crumbling facade. Last week, the Vatican denied a preservation group’s appeal of Worcester Bishop Robert McManus’ decision to merge Our Lady of Mount Carmel and sister church Our Lady of Loreto into one parish. The bishop has decreed that the church be deconsecrated, which paves the way for the church building and surrounding five acres to be put up for sale. The church also appeared on the list in 2016 and the Preservation Massachusetts Most Endangered Resources List in 2016-2017.

- 14 Northampton St. - The privately-owned stick-style building in the Grant Square area of Worcester was originally one of 48 house lots laid out in 1848. The vacant house “needs a lot of work,” according to Ms. Packard.

- Notre Dame des Canadiens Church, 5 Salem Square - Demolition could happen at any time, as the Planning Board has approved a site plan that would replace the 1929 Romanesque Revival church with apartments as part of the CitySquare project. A one-year demolition delay on the property expired in April. Along with Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the church appeared on the Preservation Massachusetts Most Endangered Resources List in 2016-2017. The church was on the Preservation Worcester list in 2009 and 2016.

- Hope Cemetery Barn, 119 Webster St. - Built in 1889, the stick and shingle-style barn is still used to store groundskeeping equipment and materials at the cemetery. Ms. Packard said the building is being ruined by neglect and is one of the few remaining barns in the city. It was on the list in 2006 and 2016.
- Three-decker porches, citywide - A key feature on a unique form of late 19th-century residential architecture throughout Worcester, the stacked porches on three-deckers have often been removed or enclosed with vinyl siding to make additional living space. This destroys unique architectural decoration and makes the buildings more generic and box-like, preservationists say. The porches were on the list in 2016.
- Helen Dodge Three-Decker, 570 Pleasant St. - The property, which is under a one-year demolition delay, is one of three three-deckers in a row on Pleasant Street. Preservationists fear the building could be torn down for a parking lot.
- Lothrop's Opera House (Olympia Theater), 17-27 Pleasant St. - The oldest standing theater in the city, which opened in 1891, and is part of a national registered historic district. The theater closed in 2006, but retailers operate out of the modified storefronts. The theater was included as a potential "building to be demolished" in the Worcester Redevelopment Authority Downtown Urban Revitalization Plan. It was on the list in 2016.
- Holbrook-Sawyer Building, 521 Main St. - The building houses the Great Wall restaurant, whose rear wall partially collapsed in May. Preservationists hope the original facade of the tall, thin Italianate structure is intact underneath a modern covering.
- Carriage houses, citywide - Often neglected because zoning laws make it difficult to convert them to rental properties, carriage houses are at a risk of demolition by neglect, Ms. Packard said.
- Revitalize your neighborhood, citywide - Preservation Worcester encourages people to volunteer to do minor home repair services to help neighbors. A lack of physical or financial ability to tackle renovation projects can lead to demolition by neglect, so preservationists are urging some neighborliness to help combat the disrepair.

The list and more details on each property are online at www.preservationworchester.org/endangered-structures/

Preservation Worcester also recognized some successes in the city, whether through the efforts of private citizens, nonprofit organizations, or others. This is the first year that all but the Stearns Tavern have appeared on the commendations list.

The commendations include H. Hopkins House, 24 Hollywood St.; Kelley-Jaynes House, 25 Frothingham Road; Altieri's Sunoco Service Station, 779 Main St.; Dr. Benjamin F. Heywood House, 115 Heywood St.; and Samuel Sturtevant House, 89 Blithewood Ave.

Other successes listed are the Chestnut Street Congregational Church gargoyles, eight 3,000-pound stone gargoyles that were returned to the city in February a decade after they went missing and are now in storage, awaiting a permanent home; and Stearns Tavern, a circa-1812 tavern that was moved from 651 Park Ave. to the shore of Coes Pond in October 2016, and is being renovated for a spring 2018 opening as a cafe and offices for the Seven Hills Foundation, along with community space.