

## Remarks Regarding the 2015 Endangered Historic Resources List, Historic Albany Foundation

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Thank you, Kim Alvarez for chairing the committee and for this list. Also want to recognize the Preservation Advocacy Committee who are here today - Daniel McEneny, staff members Cara Macri and Lisa Crompton. Also thanks to Nicki Bertsch and Christine Jaworski from our staff for putting this day and art show together and to the Board for their guidance. Board members in attendance—Nancy Burton, our President; Al DeSalvo, Susan Kirchheimer, Phil Hansen. Welcome to all our friends here today including Julian Adams from SHPO. We also send a big thank you to Columbia Development-Brandon Stabler and Samantha Toews for hosting our press conference today here at the Berkshire Apartments. Wellington Row was on our 2005 List and we'd like to congratulate Columbia Development (and Aeon Nexus at 138 State Street) for a preservation job well done and I include the former Dewitt Clinton Hotel, now the Albany Renaissance in that note of appreciation. If you haven't had the chance to visit the hotel, do so today. Our neighbors from the row are here today-welcome to Capital Bank and Leola from the Albany Renaissance. These projects are beyond our wildest dreams for these properties—remember this site as it was in 2005 - a façade only site with all floors collapsed -- when I started at Historic Albany and look today. With the synergy of the convention center perfectly placed on Eagle Street and next to the hotel, it is the perfect marriage of a fabulous preservation project with a new building that will allow us many more opportunities for visitors and residents to appreciate our historic city.

We were a bit targeted in our 2015 Endangered List –(and yes, we are a little late getting it out) in that we picked themes and properties we were already working on, some intensely with the property owners and some are just beginning. This work is done, not in the media or in front of the general public, but behind the scenes every day, all day. We will introduce the 4 Themes and 2 individual sites in a moment.

In our everyday advocacy, education and technical services, we can truly visualize the end result and so, see all of these sites as opportunities. We work to resolve these issues of vacancy, deterioration and to bring resources to these iconic structures. We recognize that many of them are challenging sites. In the current fiscal climate, we see former solutions and resources shrinking and realize that creativity and partnerships are the name of the game in rehabilitation and restoration. A multi-layered approach with many partners is really the ticket. But we know the work is not just about historic preservation-in fact, there are scant resources for straight preservation. Partnerships are being built with the City of Albany, the State Historic Preservation Office with Federal and New York State tax credits, and many other programs within the State and Federal government such as DEC, ESD, HCR, former RESTORE funds, and the current CFA process because these urban buildings are the backbone of a strong economic development component in our cities. The other partners that are a must, of course, are the private companies and individuals who are willing to invest and develop these properties.

At the municipal level, we see resources as more than just a letter of support—we must eliminate red tape and provide technical assistance as key components in getting these properties to their next life. Mayor Sheehan recently instituted a “one stop shop” for the departments of Planning, Buildings and Regulatory Compliance, Corporation Counsel and others where the City agencies involved in a possible project come to the table with the prospective developer BEFORE any serious money is spent on redevelopment.

The Federal and State Rehabilitation Tax Credits are also available for many of these projects and what I call the “gap filler”—the difference between restoring a historic building and a new building. The State tax credits are scheduled to sunset in 2019 and besides leaving it to the lobbyists to advocate for it, there is no better way to show the necessity of the credits than to USE them. Prime examples abound just outside Governor Cuomo’s window at the Capitol.

The Endangered List’s 4 themes embody many different properties but ones that are probably familiar to so many of you in your neighborhoods and travels throughout the City. We found online that only two of these properties are actively marketed for sale and so constructive conversations with real estate agents are vitally important to get these properties to the next life.

On the handouts you’ve received, the Endangered List shows the 4 Themes and 2 Individual Sites. Then, each theme has examples and we will highlight a few. We haven’t covered every example—I am sure you can identify others.

The Endangered List’s Theme #1: Vacant Religious Properties—we truly have a church on every corner but not the congregants to fill them. These icons were the center of community life, were built in a high style and used quality materials but will need adaptive reuse to survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 2 examples—the former St. John’s Roman Catholic Church at 42 Green Street and Church of the Holy Innocents at 275 North Pearl Street. St. John’s is part of the southern Gateway to the City (and if I had a nickel for every time someone asked me about that building, it’d be restored already). The Church of the Holy Innocents has had much press attention lately and is one of the buildings on this List that is for sale. In a partnership with current owners, the City, consultants, other local stakeholders and Historic Albany, we have seen much interest in restoring this building and we are hopeful to have news soon.

Endangered List’s Theme #2--Zombie Buildings. Zombies are vacant or unmaintained properties that are trapped in the foreclosure process or estate proceedings. Examples of these properties can be found in every neighborhood and no one is immune from their public safety and nuisance issues. A prime example is 558 Madison Avenue, owned by a local private owner who will not allow it to be purchased, and will not restore or fix code violations. Until a new owner is found and the current owner releases this property, we fear that it will not survive as part of its historic, intact row. A second group, not in our literature, but recently put up for sale are the portfolio, partially owned by Herb Ellis, of 4 buildings and 2 parking garages. Of great concern to Historic Albany are the former Kenmore Hotel, the former Times Union building, and the former Steuben Club especially due to the large asking price of \$17.9 million plus at least \$3 million in liens, and until a new owner comes forward to reuse and

restore, the buildings could sit vacant and continue to deteriorate over the next few years detracting from the positive investment happening now.

Theme #3: Under-utilized municipal buildings represents properties that once served the community, and represented significant public investment. These properties also traditionally used a well-known architect and quality materials-hence, the reason they are still standing today. For every one we've highlighted as needing a new use such as Third Precinct Police Station and School 22, we have more examples of great success with this type of building in Albany: School 12-now 27 Western Avenue Apartments, Philip Livingston –now Livingston Apartments, St. Joseph's Academy now Academy Lofts and many others. With the right partners and resources, this category will have the most movement, we believe, in the next 5 years. Central Fire Alarm Station, owned by the City, is another site ripe for redevelopment, and we will stay tuned to its next life.

Endangered List Theme #4: Historic Commercial Corridors. As in most 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial cities, Albany watched its population decline as residents moved to the suburbs, and the bustling commercial corridor with locally owned business and tenant housing become vacant and slid into disrepair. Looking to the Warehouse District and Central Avenue, we see much opportunity in these areas. In the Warehouse District, in a discussion about this List with Mayor Sheehan, we agreed that the ReZone planning going on now is a great chance to develop a Plan, inventory the resources, and move to a course of action to restore and reuse those buildings. It will not happen overnight but thankfully, there has already been significant investment so there is much more opportunity to build on the recent successes.

2 individual listings: 1.) Rapp Road Historic District is a National Register of Historic Places listed district, for its role in the Great Migration and thus, represents African-American experience on the National Register list—which only has about 3% culturally diverse listings. Unwanted development around this district and the Pine Bush Preserve which surrounds it, can be a threat to this locally and nationally unique site. Local listing of the district would help these assets immensely.

2.) The last listing is the former Sunshine School, also known as the James Hall House, which is one of ONLY 6 National Historic Landmarks in Albany, NHL being the crème de la crème. This house was designed for James Hall, a prolific and important mid-19<sup>th</sup> century State Geologist in 1852, designed by the nationally prominent American architects, Andrew Jackson Downing and his student, Calvert Vaux. In the architecture world, this duo are each famous in their own right and this building is one of few commissions they did together-Downing died in a steamboat accident on the Hudson River the year this building was completed. This unique building sits vacant although owned by the Albany City School District. We would like to see it also included as part of the National Register nomination for Lincoln Park, currently being conducted by the City and SHPO. Also, and not to make light of the vote—but the City school district has the referendum scheduled for February 9<sup>th</sup> and wouldn't it be great to take just even \$1 million for the James Hall House from the \$180 Million proposed?

Historic Albany will keep the Endangered List properties at the forefront by continuing to discuss these themes, buildings and opportunities. We have planned--workshops, pub lectures, walking tours around

these assets, starting soon so stay tuned. Look for that information on our website and Facebook page and if you are not on our email list, please sign up today or become a dues-paying member.

In May of this year, the Cities of Albany and Troy will host Preservation at 50, the Statewide Preservation Conference, to highlight 50 years since the National Historic Preservation Act was enacted. The conference will have solution based discussions and show off some of the best examples of historic preservation across the state with some national highlights.

We encourage you to help us think boldly and creatively about these assets and to not let them suffer their fates anymore. We need daring new ideas, resources, risk takers, the public and support from all quarters of government.

Lastly, two other things that you can do right now. You are invited to Assemblymember Patricia Fahy's Open House who has generously donated gallery space to show local artists' work that highlights the 2015 EHR List-there will be light refreshments until 10:30 AM and a chance to see the gallery at Legislative Office Building, Room 452.

And tomorrow is my birthday. So it would be nice, if you would like to give me a gift, for you to take one of these buildings off this list!

There is literature here if you didn't already pick it up. We look forward to working together on this list and for the great City of Albany. Thank you.