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Subject: Cathedral of Immaculate Conception, Burlington VT

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I am writing from the Getty Conservation Institute's Conserving Modern Architecture Initiative, whose goal is to generate and disseminate resources for the field related to conserving built heritage from the 20th Century. We are not an advocacy organization per se, but we do take an interest in current events related to modern buildings that have been preserved and actively reused, as well as those that are threatened with demolition. For us, determining the cultural significance of modern heritage, and looking for ways to conserve it, is of great importance. We have been apprised that on January 11, 2023, the Burlington Development Review Board will hold a hearing concerning the proposed demolition of the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception designed by architect Edward Larrabee Barnes and landscape architect Dan Kiley. It seems likely that when a modernist work has a pedigree like this, it deserves special consideration before its demolition is approved. We have found out that a part of the discussion of its historic significance centers on its age, since the city of Burlington's code, "Sec. 5.4.8 Historic Buildings and Sites" requires that a building must be 50 years or older.

In our view, the significance of a work of architecture or landscape design can rarely be adequately ascertained merely by looking at its age. The limitations of the "50-year rule" has been recognized in many parts of the world – and here in California – where heritage designation is subject of a "30-year rule." In the US, places can be listed on the national register that are less than 50 years old if they are found to possess "exceptional significance". In the city of Los Angeles, which is definitely a 20th century city, there is no 50-year rule, and places receive heritage designation for many reasons including associations with diverse and underrepresented communities, associations with architects and designers, historic events, and many other considerations. As Carroll West wrote for the National Council on Public History, "[what determines significance is not age as much as the history associated with the property.](#)"

We recognize that the Burlington Development Review Board is not a legislative body, but we hope that the current consideration of the Cathedral, which is a significant collaboration by two profoundly important designers, sparks a broader discussion about reevaluating Sec. 5.4.8 and the 50-year threshold.

Best Regards,

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