



College of Environmental Design  
Department of Architecture

12 December 2022

Mary O'Neil, Principal Planner, AICP  
Office of Permitting & Inspections  
City of Burlington, Vermont

RE: Preservation of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, 20 Pine Street, Burlington, Vermont

Dear Ms. O'Neil:

This letter is written in response to the proposed demolition of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (1974-77), designed by architect Edward Larrabee Barnes and sited within a grove of honey-locusts designed by landscape architect Dan Kiley. Barnes and Kiley collaborated frequently during their professional lives – especially on publicly accessible spaces. They shared a strong design aesthetic characterized by clarity and simplicity of form and composition, and a commitment to the communities being served by their projects. Centrally located in downtown Burlington, the Cathedral and its setting epitomize these values.

The Cathedral and its grove occupy most of a city block. Its iconic verticality - that one associates with religious architecture is expressed directly through its a sharply pitched metal-sheathed roof and cross. Its form, as well as the grove planted in a strict grid, visually connect and expand the historic downtown core, mitigating the impact of urban renewal west and southwest of downtown. Access to the church interior is from a parking lot located west of the church and from two diagonal pathways that cut across the grove, creating three points of entry to the generous narthex. Upon entry, the visitor is drawn toward the sanctuary through a combination of design strategies. These include the contrast of somewhat compressed space of the standard height narthex, office, meeting, rehearsal rooms and expansion created by the soaring ca. 50-foot-high sanctuary space. The latter results from the verticality of the sanctuary space – where pitched, white walls reflect brilliant light from a skylight, embracing the semi-circular seating – designed to bring the worshipers close to the service taking place on the chancel. Ceremonial attributes adorn the interior: a cross filled with dark blue stained glass, the baptismal font, a tabernacle, and the organ – all beautiful in their simplicity.

The church and its grove are important, brilliantly conceived spaces, that expand the humanistic quality of the historic downtown through their form and plan. The loss of these spaces goes far beyond the serious, and significant loss of important works of architecture and landscape. Their loss will be a loss to the City of Burlington where aerial photographs reveal a dearth of park space. Burlington is a city with many handsome nineteenth century buildings but few distinguished works of **modernism**.

Today, the preservation of buildings and cultural landscapes is recognized as an act of sustainability. We recognize the embodied energy in existing building, as well as the importance of conserving construction materials. Global warming and other indicators of the fragility of the planet must be considered when demolishing existing structures. Landscaped spaces planted with trees, grass and other vegetation makes a positive contribution to our environment. Projecting future uses of the Cathedral and grove – these are spaces easily adapted other denominations or faiths, or as a community center for secular use.

With my deepest conviction, I strongly urge you to preserve the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and its grove. These are significant cultural resources; the Cathedral has already been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It should be noted that such eligibility considers the National Register's Criteria Consideration A which allows for religious properties that derive their primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance, and Criteria Consideration G for properties achieving significance within the past 50 years if they are of exceptional importance.

I would be happy to discuss any aspect of this letter with you. I can be reached at lwbricker@cpp.edu or 909.241.3021. Thank you for this opportunity to express my views on the importance of preserving these resources.

Sincerely yours,

*Lauren Bricker*

Lauren Weiss Bricker, Ph.D.  
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