

CATHE DRAL of THE IMMACU LATE DEMO LITION

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Much of Burlington is generic. Walking the streets, it could be any city of comparable size anywhere in New England. Its specificity has much to do with its churches : their location, their formal attributes, their purpose as urban place-markers and place-shapers.

Downtown Burlington is bounded by the lake to the west, a formerly working class residential neighborhood to the south, and two rows of Churches to the east and north.

Cherry Street dead-ends to the west at Battery Street ; at its eastern end it dead-ends at Winooski Avenue at the foot of the First Congregational Church. Church Street dead-ends at King Street at its southern end, and—at its northern end—at the foot of the Church of the First Unitarian Universalist Society at Pearl Street. The northern boundary of the central business district is secured by St Paul's Church, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and the Unitarian Church. The eastern boundary is secured by the Ronald McDonald House, the First Congregational Church, the First United Methodist Church and—just east of the Fletcher Free Library—the College Street Congregational Church.

The particular disposition of this formidable alignment of churches is a defining constituent of Burlington's unique urban form. It is, on its own, a historic, religious infrastructure. Originally it was clearly meant to constitute a sacred boundary to the profane activities of the central business district, a spiritual transition to the domestic activities that lay beyond. Nowadays it is apparently possible to think of it simply as real estate. The watchdogs of historic preservation within the Department of Planning and Zoning apparently have no trouble with this : they have expressed no concern for the imminent sale and destruction of the Catholic Cathedral.

But this is a big deal. If the most sacred piece of the urban fabric can be disappeared, Soprano fashion, for a few coins, if nothing is sacred, if nothing is permanent, if nothing is beyond buying and selling, then we're committing to living in a land fill.

Albert Petrarca decries the absence of indigenous peoples in the downtown Mural ; he calls it racist. I am a secular person. What shall we call the destruction of historical markers, symbols of religious diversity, swimming holes in the spiritual currents which flow through our community ? Blasphemous ? **05401**



Photograph by MICHAEL WISNIEWSKI