



December 8, 2022

Ms. Mary O'Neil, AICP  
Principal Planner for Development Review  
Zoning Division of the Department of Permitting and Inspection  
City of Burlington  
149 Church Street  
Burlington, VT 05401

Re: ZP-22-576 / Demolition Permit Application for Burlington Cathedral

Dear Ms. O'Neil,

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception is a significant collaboration between two extremely important and influential postwar designers: Edward Larrabee Barnes (architect) and Daniel Urban Kiley (landscape architect). Moreover, it is a rare extant Vermont commission by Kiley, an internationally revered practitioner, who lived and worked in Charlotte, VT. The Cathedral is also a memorial of sorts as it was built on the site of the original 1860s gothic Cathedral, which was lost to an arsonist's fire in 1972.

In 2012 The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) included the Cathedral in the report and digital exhibition [Landscape and Patronage](#), which focused “on visionary patrons and organizations and the sites they helped create.” The report cited the Diocese’s “bold choice to construct the new, modern cathedral and Modernist landscape” on the site of the former Cathedral. It added: “Instead of relocating to a suburban location or settling for an uninspired replacement building, the Diocese remained committed to serving the downtown area and enhancing the urban environment with its new facility.”

Of the collaboration between Kiley and Barnes, and as context for the Burlington commission, the report states: “The two had a long-standing working relationship, having collaborated previously on several projects, among them the Osborne House, Vermont (1954) and the W.D. Richards Elementary School, Columbus, Indiana (1965). Kiley and Barnes would later go on to produce several significant designs, including that for the Dallas Museum of Art, Texas (1983) and housing for the Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana (1984).”

Barnes and Kiley’s close collaboration can be seen, in part, in the interplay between color and form - the cathedral’s low, dark green glazed brick walls and soaring copper roof juxtaposed against the light green foliage and dark trunks of the locust trees. Viewed together, the structure and landscape blend harmoniously to create a peaceful and inviting public space that anchors the center of downtown Burlington. Moreover, Kiley’s design is reminiscent of his work at the Miller House and Garden in Columbus, IN, his widely acclaimed residential masterpiece and international Modernist icon now owned by the Indianapolis Museum of Art. The report notes: “the placement of trees in the cathedral’s landscape creates a unique spatial experience for visitors, elongating and extending the viewer’s sense of boundary yielding a site that feels distinctly removed from its urban setting despite being situated at a busy intersection.”

Given the history and significance of the Cathedral, it is unfortunate that the Diocese is contemplating its demolition. Doing so would erase an important chapter not just in the history of

the Catholic church, but in the city of Burlington as a whole. We understand that the needs of the Catholic church in Burlington are evolving, and the Diocese considers this property redundant. But we urge the Diocese to instead find a way to adapt it for a new use that would serve the community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to let it continue to function as a vital piece of Burlington's varied and unique downtown fabric. Demolition now would eliminate any possibility of adaptive reuse, and this is too important a property to risk losing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a smaller 'B' and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR  
President and CEO

cc: Msgr. Peter Routhier  
Rev. Msgr. John McDermott