


WHITE ELEPHANTS

Repurposing former neighborhood gems

What's a white elephant?

white elephant n.

1. Rare, expensive possession that's a financial burden to maintain;
2. Something of dubious or limited value;
3. Possession unwanted by its owner;
4. Endeavor or venture that proves to be a conspicuous failure.



Are you herding white elephants?

Chances are your community has at least one white elephant!

- Churches
- Schools
- Armories
- Depots
- Mills/factories



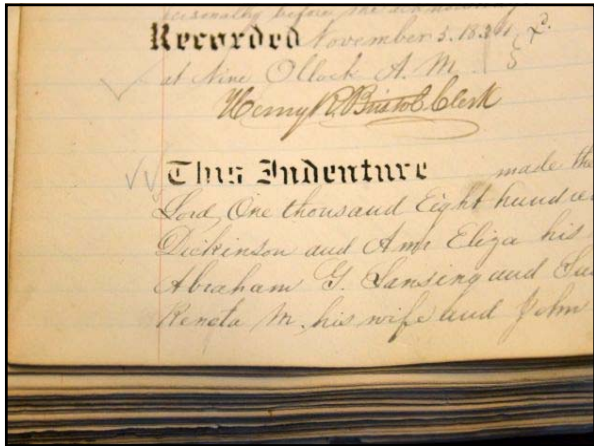
Rusting neighborhood anchors

How did we end up with so many white elephants?

- Natural cycle of neighborhood growth and decay
- Restrictive zoning
- Natural disasters (flood, fire, tornado, etc.)
- Decline of neighborhood parochial schools
- Change in transportation options
- Temporary architectural nature of big box stores
- Changes in retail trends; glut of space

Churches are special cases

- Shrinking urban congregations
 - Population shift from cities to suburbs
- Parish mergers and closings
- May not be handicapped accessible
- Financial troubles
 - Dwindling donations
 - Parochial school tuitions too high to sustain
 - Repairs, maintenance, utilities too high
- Reverter clauses



Legal bulwark: reverter clause

Deed clause requiring property to be used as house of worship or else returned to donor's heirs

- Must demonstrate "diligent search" for heirs
- Typical arguments:
 - heirs can't be found, or
 - there are too many heirs



Rensselaer County Clerk's office

Taking action against derelict properties

- Force church through code enforcement to either sell dilapidated property, fix, or demolish
 - ▣ selling requires blessing from diocese
 - ▣ city could deny demolition
- Consider if adjacent buildings/land still in use (rectory, convent, schools, gardens, parking lots)
- Non-owners want to dictate what happens next...
 - ▣ Should they have a say?
 - ▣ Do they have a say?

Zoning can hinder or help

- Pre-existing nonconforming use
- Or flexible enough to allow use
- Is a use variance spot zoning?
 - Not if the change is in best interest of neighborhood and supported by comprehensive plan
- Zoning should not be a hindrance

Real property taxes

Religious, charitable, educational, and government uses are generally off the tax rolls

- Partial exemptions possible for historic buildings; multiple dwellings; and “commercial, business or industrial property in an economic transformation area”
- Adaptive reuses for private or commercial purposes could generate new tax dollars



Adaptive reuse: church

- Church sharing
- Residential
- Commercial or municipal
- Food and drink
- Cultural
- Recreational and entertainment

Church sharing

Cooperative facilities use

- Multiple congregations share one building
 - ▣ Burden of additional expensive buildings avoided
 - ▣ Shared maintenance and utility expenses
- Room use, time, and priorities made jointly by committee or between church leaders
- For churches in decline, this is an opportunity to participate in a meaningful transition

Fraternity house

Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity house, RPI
Former St. Francis de Sales, Troy



Image credit: Rensselaer/Daria Robbins

Marketplace

The Limelight Marketplace,
Former Church of the Holy Communion, NYC



Web design/marketing

Overit Media
Former St. Teresa of Avila, Albany



Screen printing

Wicked Smart Apparel
former St. Bridget's, Watervliet



Hotel

Hotel Skyler
Former Temple Adath Yeshurun
Salt City Theatre, Syracuse



Municipal offices

Green Island Power Authority and town offices
Former St. Mark's Episcopal, Green Island



Armories

Unity Center

Newburgh Armory Unity Center, Newburgh

- Formed by individuals and community organizations
- Programs aimed at inner city youth
- Focus on athletics, personal development, and business advancement to benefit residents



Brewery

Ravens Head Brewery, Cohoes
Former Cohoes Armory

City welcomed them:

- Fits into existing zoning and neighborhood business plan
- Ample parking on site/on-street



Museum

NYS Military Museum, Saratoga
Former Saratoga Armory

- Capitalized on existing tourism traffic
- 10,000 artifacts from Revolutionary War to Desert Storm
- Largest collection of state battle flags
- Veterans Research Center



Arena

Albany Armory Sports & Convention Arena, Albany
Former Albany Armory

- Sports arena (roller derby, basketball, tennis tournaments)
- Concerts
- Conventions



Bed and breakfast

Amsterdam Castle B&B, Amsterdam



- Decommissioned in 1995, converted to 36,000 sq ft private home
- National Register of Historic Places
- Featured on HGTV "Re-zoned"

Depots

Library

Waterford Public Library, Waterford, NY Former D & H Railroad depot



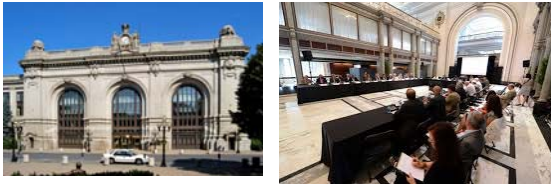
Off Track Betting

Cohoes, NY
Former D & H Railroad depot



Nanotech hub

Albany, NY
Former Albany Union Station
Former Norstar Bankcorp



Mills and factories

Luxury loft apartments

The Lofts at Harmony Mills
Former Harmony Mills, Cohoes



Live/work art studios

Art Space
Former Buffalo Vehicle Company



Conclusion

Why is it important to care about old buildings?

What can adaptive reuse do for your community?

- Incite community revitalization and job creation
- Preserve community character
- Use existing infrastructure
- Use existing materials and craftsmanship that otherwise are difficult or cost prohibitive to reproduce

New York Department of State

(518) 473-3355 Training Unit

(800) 367-8488 Toll Free

Email: localgov@dos.ny.gov

Website: www.dos.ny.gov

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Bookstore

□ Selexyz Dominicanen,
Netherlands



Image credit: Design Top News

Brewery

The Church Brew Works
former St. John the Baptist, Pittsburgh



Bakery

Blue Bonnet Bakery, Fort Worth, TX



Boutique winery

South River Vineyard, Shalersville, OH
Former Methodist Episcopal Church



Recreation

Treasure Castle Playland
Former South Williamsport Methodist Church, PA



Not for profit foundation

Arcus Landmark Depot, MI



- Home to Arcus Foundation (human, civil and animal rights)
- Multi-function gathering space wintergarden
- Café and office space
- Revitalized long forgotten part of the city

Church	Location	New Use
St. Francis de Sales	Troy, NY	Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity house
St. Paul's	Troy, NY	Unity House Daycare Center
Woodside Presbyterian Church	Troy, NY	The Contemporary Artist Center
St. Teresa of Avila	Albany, NY	Overit Media
St. John the Baptist	Pittsburgh, PA	Church Brew Works
Apostolic Pentecostal	Rensselaer, NY	Cathedral Sounds Studio
South Williamsport Methodist Church	South Williamsport	Treasure Castle Playland
?	Stockholm, Sweden	Entreprenörskykan Entrepreneur Center
Temple Adath Yeshurun	Syracuse, NY	Hotel Skyler
Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion	New York City, NY	Limelight

**ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
OF THE CITY OF WATERVLIET
RESOLUTION NUMBER 946**

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WHEREAS, Wicked Smart, LLC, prospective owner of 700 5th Avenue, Watervliet, New York, has filed an application with the Zoning Board of Appeals of the City of Watervliet, New York requesting zoning board approval for a use variance to convert St. Brigid's Church and Old School into a sportswear customization business; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to notice duly published in the official newspaper of the City of Watervliet, New York, a public hearing was conducted by this Board on April 13, 2011 at 7:00 PM in the Court Room, City Hall, Watervliet, New York, and

WHEREAS, at said public hearing, all those who desired to be heard were heard and their testimony recorded, and

WHEREAS, all testimony has been carefully reviewed and considered and the following pertinent facts considered:

1. The applicant is under contract to purchase the property pending all City of Watervliet Zoning Board and Planning Board approvals.
2. The subject premise is in an R-3 Residential District.
3. The neighborhood is primarily residential.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Watervliet Zoning Board of Appeals that the SEQRA form was approved for said application stating there were no significant adverse environmental effects associated with proposed application.

Introduced by: Czarnecki
Moved by: Czarnecki
Seconded by: Such

Adopted by the following vote:
All in Favor - 6
Not In Favor - 0
Abstentions - 0

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the application as presented for the aforesaid variance from certain provisions of said Ordinance which are pertinent to the requested variances is hereby **APPROVED** with the following stipulations:

1. The existing roadway through the premises shall remain open at all times as a public accessway.
2. There will be no signage and the exterior will remain as it presently exists, subject to maintenance.
3. The storage of all materials on the premises shall comply with the NYS Fire Prevention and Building Code.

RESOLVED, that this Resolution is effective immediately and is herewith filed with the Secretary of the Board, and that a copy of the same is served with the notice of filing thereof upon the applicant and a copy filed with the Building Inspector.

Introduced by: Dugan

Moved by: Dugan

Seconded by: Gilchrist

All in Favor - 6

Not In Favor – 0

Abstentions 0