



**Department
of State**

Adaptive Reuses for White Elephants

Repurposing former neighborhood gems

A Division of New York Department of State

What's a white elephant?

white elephant *n.*

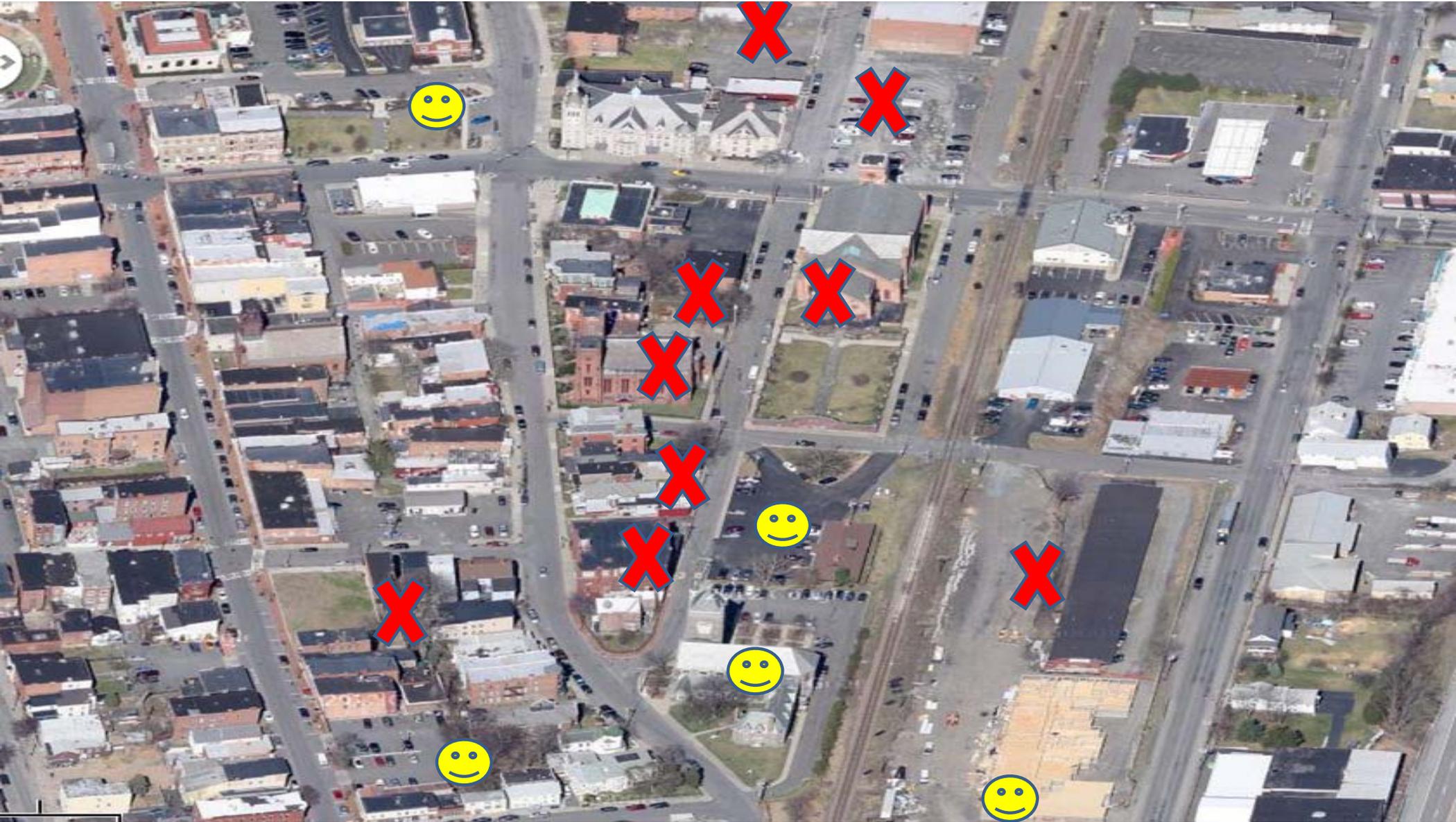
1. Rare, expensive possession that's a financial burden to maintain;
2. Something of dubious or limited value;
3. Possession unwanted by its owner;
4. Endeavor or venture that proves to be a conspicuous failure.



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

personally before me and my
Recorded November 5. 1834 P.

✓ at nine O'clock A. M. 5
Henry P. Bristol Clerk

✓ This Indenture made the
5th day of October 1834 between
said One thousand Eight hundred and
Twenty five Dollars to the said
Dickinson and Ann Eliza his
Abraham G. Sensing and Susanna
Bereta M. his wife and John

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



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

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



Marketplace

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

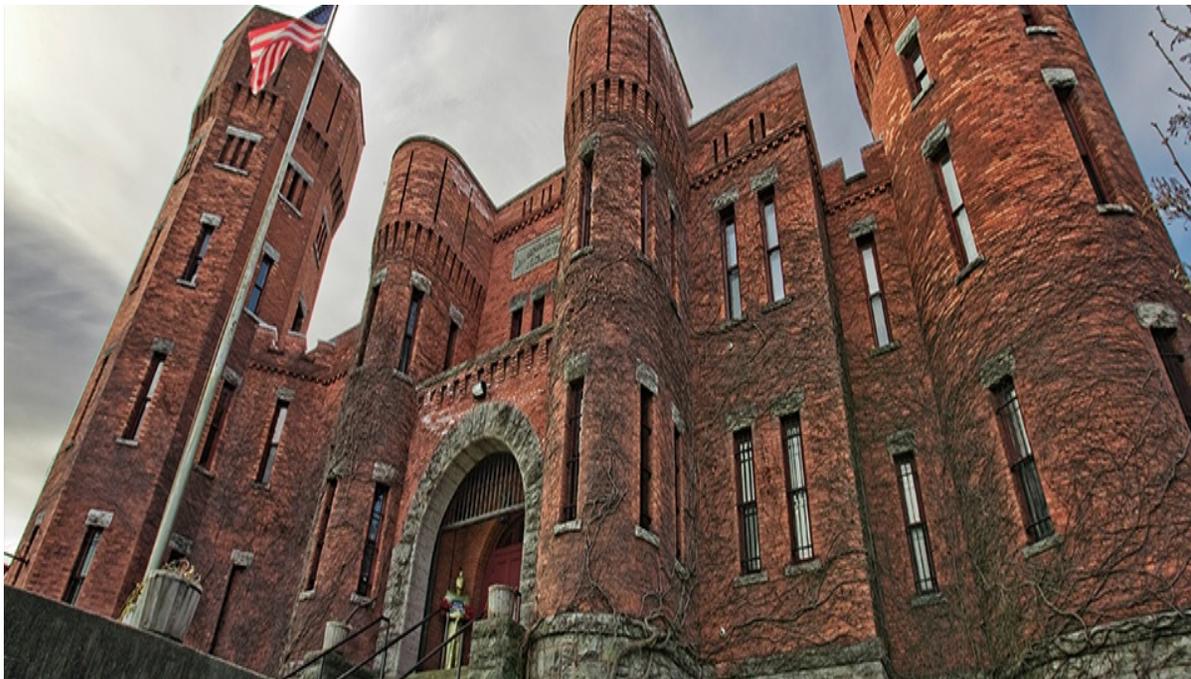
Albany Armory Sports & Convention Arena, Albany Former Albany Armory



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

Bed and breakfast

Amsterdam Castle B&B, Amsterdam, Former Amsterdam Armory



- 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, former D & H Railroad depot



Off Track Betting

Cohoes, NY, former D & H Railroad depot



Nanotech hub

Former Albany Union Station, former Norstar Bankcorp, Albany



Restaurant

Former Potsdam Train Station now Mama Lucia's Restaurant, Potsdam



Mills and factories

Luxury loft apartments

The Lofts at Harmony Mills, Former Harmony Mills, Cohoes



Live/work art studios

Art Space, former Buffalo Electric Vehicle Company



Restaurant

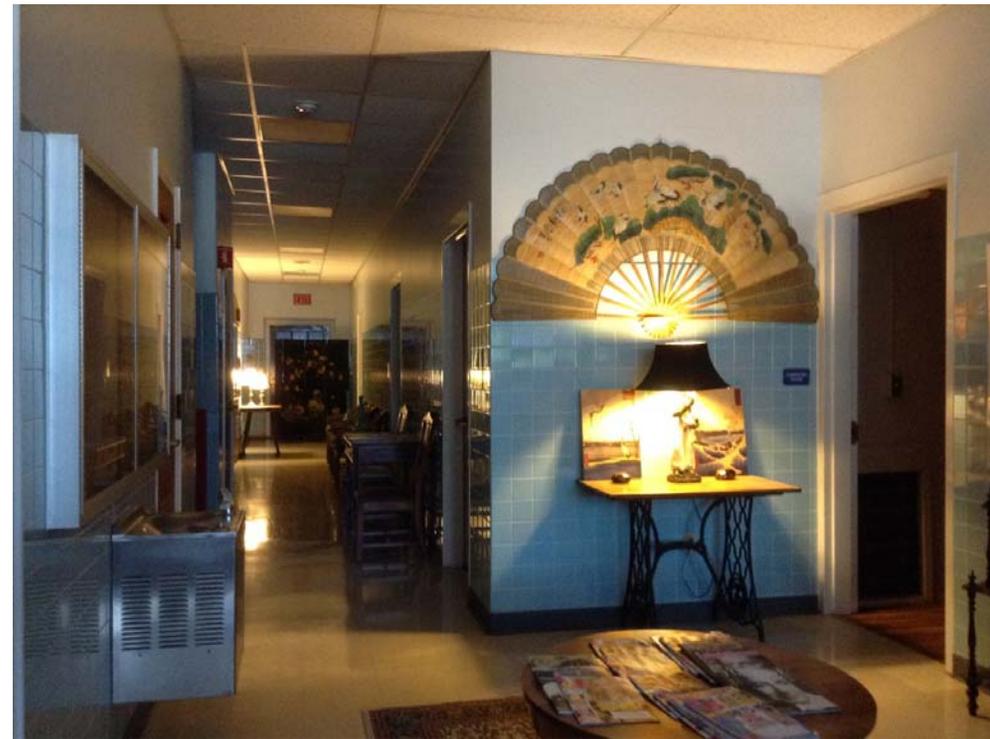
Cactus Grill Restaurant, Former Water Plant, Potsdam



Schools

Inn

Sherman Inn, Former Sherman School, Ogdensburg



Apartments

Hepburn Heights Apartments, Former Norfolk School, Norfolk



Tax credits

National Register of Historic Places

- Honor, NOT restriction
- Associated with important events or persons
- Places embodying characteristics of period, method, or “master”
- Likely to reveal history about a place



Federal Investment Tax Credit



- 20% of rehab of NR-listed income-producing buildings
- Subtracted from owners' income taxes
- 5-year restriction for sale, alteration
- <http://www.nysparks.com/shpo/tax-credit-programs/>



NYS Credit, Commercial Buildings



- 20% credit on State taxes
- Eligible census tract (at or below state median income)
- Qualifying work
- Approved Federal Tax Credit Application

NYS Historic Barn Tax Credit

- Barns built or in agricultural service before 1936
- Income-producing
- Rehab can't alter historic appearance
- Not for former barns converted to residences



Local Historic Preservation Regulations



- Individual buildings or districts
- Often also listed on National Register
- Protection of structure and historic detail



Certified Local Government Program

- Local legislation, separate historic district review commission with qualified members
- Muni/SHPO partnership, muni reports its activities to SHPO
- Technical services
- Reimbursement grants
 - Training for commission members, public education
 - Public education
 - Surveys, NR nomination, historic structure reports, guidelines



Real Property Tax Law §444-a



- Muni can delay increased tax assessment on rehabbed historic properties
- Exempt increased value 100% first five years; decreasing 20% over second five
- For work approved by local historic district review boards



Easements, Transfer of Development



- Article 5-K, General Municipal Law: munis may purchase or receive façade easements
- Transfer of development rights for historic properties

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

Resources

- New York State Office for Historic Preservation 518-237-8643 <http://nysparks.com/shpo/>
- Preservation League of New York State www.preservenys.org
- National Trust for Historic Preservation www.preservationnation.org
- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation www.achp.gov/
- National Alliance of Preservation Commissions <http://napc.uga.edu/index.htm>
- Association for Preservation Technology <http://www.aptnet.org/>

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