



*Hartford*

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# Preservation Alliance

## Hartford Preservation Ordinance Takes Effect!



A house known as "the Victorian Lady" was saved from demolition in 2004 with its relocation to 21 Ashley Street, in Hartford's Asylum Hill neighborhood. On October 31, Mayor Eddie Perez used the house as a backdrop to announce that he was taking the final steps toward implementing the Hartford Preservation Ordinance. Flanking the mayor are HPA Executive Director Laura Knott-Twine and Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA) Executive Director Ken Johnson. Second row: HPA President Lynn Ferrari, HPA Board Member and city Historic Preservation Commission Chairman Greg Secord, Councilman Dr. Robert Painter and HPA Board Member Maria Gabriela Galarza-Block. Back row: HPA Vice President Kevin Flood and City of Hartford Director of Planning Roger O'Brien. Photo: Laura Stone

In a major victory for historic preservation in Hartford, the long-awaited Hartford Preservation Ordinance (HPO) finally took effect on December 13, 2006.

The effective date came 30 days after the design guideline manual and the HPO rules of procedure were approved by the City Council. The Hartford Preservation Alliance was involved in the initiation of the proposal three years ago and in all stages of its drafting, development and implementation.

The ordinance makes Hartford a leader among cities that recognize the value of preserving historic architecture as a tool for urban neighborhood revitalization. The ordinance aims to preserve the unique fabric of each neighborhood by reducing demolition and encouraging property owners throughout the city to maintain and improve their properties.

"The Design Guidelines and the hands-on resources that HPA and others are ready to provide will benefit not only the residents who own these buildings but also everyone who appreciates their beauty and importance," said HPA Executive Director Laura Knott-Twine. HPA expects to be a significant resource for property owners, with its historic resources advisor, Tomas Nenortas, playing an important role.

The HPO gives a new five-member Historic Preservation Commission jurisdiction over all property in all Hartford districts listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places. More than 4,000 buildings — about 20% of all properties in the city — will be affected. The largest concentrations of protected areas are in the historic Frog Hollow, Asylum Hill, West End, Clay Hill, Upper Albany, South Green and Sheldon/Charter Oak neighborhoods.

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#### Mission Statement

*The mission of the  
Hartford Preservation Alliance  
is to preserve and revitalize*

*Hartford's unique architectural heritage  
and neighborhood character.*

## Meet HPA's

# New Historic Resources Advisor

Tomas J. Nenortas has joined the staff as historic resources advisor.

According to Executive Director Laura Knott-Twine, this staff position was mandated by HPA's strategic plan to expand its scope of services to city residents. Having a second professional staff member will greatly enable HPA to help Hartford property owners to care for their historic buildings.

"Tomas is perfect for this position," says Laura. "He has a deep and abiding love for Hartford, as a third generation resident of the Hartford area. He is knowledgeable, professional, and he has a passion for the community and the city. He has an amazing ability to recall specific building locations and where important events took place in the city's history." Laura is especially pleased that Tomas is now available to help city residents with the new Historic Preservation Ordinance, which took effect in December. Prior to accepting this position, Tomas had served HPA as the President of the Board of Directors. He says it has been a very smooth transition from a dedicated volunteer to employee.

Tomas has been collecting photographs, postcards and ephemera on Hartford architecture all of his life, and his collection numbers in the thousands. When asked what his favorite part of the job is, Tomas replied, "I love digging into historical archives, like city atlases. You never know what you'll find there." His collection serves him well when he is researching specific buildings' histories and tracking changes in their appearance over time.

*"I love digging into  
historical archives"*

Now that word has gotten out about Tomas joining the HPA staff, he's even busier. He receives lots of calls from city residents in search of economical yet historically correct ways to rehabilitate their homes. Tomas also consults with churches

and commercial building owners who are struggling to care for aging buildings. He spends much of his time making "house calls" - meeting with property owners and making recommendations for renovation and repair projects. He also keeps track of vacant historic buildings and stays in contact with the city regarding the boarding up and mothballing of vacant properties.

Outside HPA, Tomas remains very active in volunteer preservation work. He is assisting his church, the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Trinity on Capitol Avenue in Hartford with its restoration plans and recently helped the church achieve a \$5,000 Technical Assistance Grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation to assess restoration needs. Through the power of the Internet and a bit of luck Tomas located the grandson of the architect who designed a portion of his church and who still has his grandfather's entire collection of Hartford commissions. More of this intriguing story will be featured in our Spring 2007 issue. Tomas has recently completed his second book, *Victorian Hartford Revisited*, which should be in bookstores this spring. 🌸

Tomas Nenortas, left,  
outside the Lithuanian  
Roman Catholic  
Church of the Most  
Holy Trinity on Capitol  
Avenue in Hartford  
with Joseph McMahon,  
grandson of the  
church's architect, Col.  
John J. McMahon.  
Photo: Laura Stone







**W**hat a full and exciting year 2006 was for HPA. The passing of the Hartford Preservation Ordinance (HPO) and the acceptance of the HPO Design Guidelines is wonderful news for Hartford and all of Connecticut.

I want to thank our senior aide, Sylvia Barr, who recently ended her contract with us. Sylvia was instrumental in creating our database of historic resources. She was central in organizing, culling, filing, describing, and entering thousands of files, monographs, and books. They'll see constant use as we work to protect our buildings. We wish Sylvia well in her next assignment.

The other significant change at HPA is the hiring of Tomas J. Nenortas as our historic resources advisor. We're grateful to the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the Connecticut Humanities Council for funding this position. Their grant enables us to offer technical assistance to those interested in restoring their buildings to their former beauty and usability. I'll continue to work with many building owners, as will the volunteers serving on our Advocacy for Buildings Committee. But now, with Tomas's position established, we hope to do even more. I'll let Tomas explain the services he offers:

"When I began working for HPA as a volunteer, I quickly became a firm believer in its mission statement: 'Working to preserve and revitalize Hartford's unique architectural heritage and neighborhood character.' The

key to Hartford's success truly lies in its neighborhoods — not in the big, headline-grabbing developments. The city encompasses 17 of these unique neighborhoods, all filled with architectural gems that you just don't find in the suburbs. They also have their own quality-of-life issues and challenges. My challenge is to help create a Hartford where historic buildings are regarded as assets, not liabilities. I will continue to advocate for adaptive reuses of great structures that were built to last.

"One of my early successes was helping Holy Trinity Church on Capitol Avenue to secure a grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. The money will help the parish assess its restoration needs. I also assisted in placing the old North-West School on Albany Avenue on the State Register of Historic Places and continue to work for its rehabilitation as the John E. Rogers African American Cultural Center. Currently, I'm working toward the eventual rehabilitation of a Civil War-era home at 53 Wadsworth Street.

"The loss of the Carmichael's building on Wethersfield Avenue, despite our best attempts to save it, was a tremendous learning experience. Among other things, it showed the need for more community collaborations. Since then, I have formed relationships with many of the city's neighborhood revitalization zones (NRZs), residents, local developers and city officials, helping them through their respective preservation plans. I look forward to working on many more projects, helping others to put even more polish on our incredible capital city. For answers to your repair, rehabilitation, or restoration questions or just to find out more on the history of your home, contact me at 860-570-0331, 860-965-5549 or [VictorianHartford@prodigy.net](mailto:VictorianHartford@prodigy.net)." 🌸

## 2006 Ends with Preservation Successes

**G**ood news! HPA's advocacy has played an important role in the preservation of five buildings whose demolition appeared imminent only a few months ago.

### Saved: 53 Wadsworth Street

HPA has helped reverse plans to demolish the pre-Civil War Italianate-style building at 53 Wadsworth Street in the South Downtown neighborhood. The building, which is nearly identical to a companion building immediately to the north, is part of a row of six intact historic buildings in the Jefferson-Seymour Historic District, most of which were built before 1865.

The structure had been marked for demolition as part of Catholic Charities' construction of a new Hispanic community center between Wadsworth and Cedar streets just north of Park Street. Both HPA and the South Downtown Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Committee opposed the proposed demolition. Working on behalf of HPA, architect William Crosskey of Crosskey Architects LLC developed a plan for the site which demonstrated that 53 Wadsworth Street could be preserved without Catholic

Charities having to make any significant changes in the design of its new building.

In the end, both the city's Planning Division and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) came to the conclusion that there are feasible and prudent alternatives to demolition. SHPO approval of demolition is necessary for the project as a whole to receive state bond funds.

Catholic Charities has now decided to retain and mothball the building. It has also expressed its willingness to work with HPA and Mr. Crosskey to consider modifications to the design of the street facades of the new building it will be constructing so as to make it more compatible with the adjacent historic buildings.

### Saved: 19 and 29 Edgewood Street

For safety reasons, the city had sought to demolish two severely deteriorated buildings on Edgewood Street, in the Homestead Avenue Historic District. But they will be preserved, thanks to action taken by the Christian Activities Council (CAC).

CAC, which has won awards for its rehabilitation and new construction



53 Wadsworth Street

Photo: Rafie Podolsky

projects on Deerfield Avenue and Homestead Avenue, purchased the six-family buildings at 19 and 29 Edgewood Street in 2003 in order to rehabilitate them. Funding, however, did not fall into place until this year, and CAC was not quite ready to begin work when the city forced the situation by issuing emergency demolition orders and threatening to demolish the buildings within a few days. Fortunately, under the leadership of executive director Don Steinle, CAC refused to give up on the

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The HPA's Tomas Nenortas, center, in hat, leads the downtown tour.

Photo: Kevin Flood

**W**ith so many familiar landmarks, what's left to learn from a tour of downtown Hartford?

Plenty, as it turns out — just ask the several dozen people who joined an October tour of downtown, led by HPA Historic Resources Advisor Tomas Nenortas.

The tour began, appropriately, at one of downtown's historic focal points: Center Church on Main Street. The congregation, celebrating its 375th anniversary, graciously allowed the tour into the current church, built in 1807. The barrel-vaulted ceiling and Tiffany windows appeared to great advantage in the morning sunlight, and a look at the various dedication plaques revealed how completely this congregation's history is intertwined with the city's. For instance, one of the windows is one dedicated to the memory of Horace Wells, the Hartford dentist who discovered anesthesia.

From Center Church, the tour proceeded to another important landmark, the Old State House. Completed in 1796, it began life as one of Connecticut's two state Capitols. (In those days, the legislature met in both Hartford and New

Haven.) When the current Capitol opened in 1876, the Old State House served as Hartford's City Hall until 1915, when the current Municipal Building on Main Street opened. Today, most of us regard the Old State House as facing Main Street. But it actually faces the Connecticut River, the center of the city's economic life in the 1790s.

The tour also made stops at some downtown buildings that don't necessarily catch the eye but are important

nevertheless. For example, that low brick building on Ann Street, just past the YMCA building, was built in 1880 by the Hartford Steam Company and originally contained boilers that generated steam for an entire network of other buildings downtown, via a

system of underground pipes. It isn't glamorous, but stopping to study its big arch windows and intricate cornices reveals that it still has personality.

The tour did get a big dose of glamour by way of a visit to the new Hartford 21 luxury apartment tower, at the corner of Trumbull and Asylum streets. Of course, there's no evidence left of the site's former occupant, the Allyn House Hotel,

which welcomed Abraham Lincoln. But thanks to the Hartford 21's management, the tour did get a bird's-eye view of all the other downtown landmarks from one of the building's upper-floor suites.

No tour of downtown would have been complete without a visit to Lewis Street, where a group of five brick houses are the last surviving examples of downtown housing as it was built in the mid-1800s. The street takes its name from Lewis Rowell, a joiner who lived in — and built — the Italianate house at 25 Lewis Street. He bought 30 Lewis Street — later

*Continued on next page*



Ruth Shapleigh-Brown talks about the Ancient Burying Ground.

Photo: Kevin Flood



to be the home of the University Club — as a wedding present for his daughter. The street was named in his honor in 1883.

Those who wanted to learn still more about downtown Hartford's history stayed on for a tour of the Ancient Burying Ground, led by Ruth Shapleigh-Brown, a conservator and public representative of the cemetery as well as executive director of the Connecticut Gravestone Network. The Burying Ground is virtually the last landmark from Hartford's origins in the 1600s, the uneven terrain serving as a reminder that the rest of downtown wasn't always so flat.

Though about 6,000 people were buried in the cemetery, only about 400 grave markers remain, and many of those — carved from soft brownstone — have been severely worn down by the elements. Still, the Burying Ground contains a slew of historical surprises. For instance, those who assumed the Irish didn't arrive in Hartford until the 19th century should visit the marker of Lt. William Knox, who died in 1787 and was born in County Tyrone, Ireland. 🍂

## Call for Nominations

*The annual Hartford Preservation Alliance Awards will take place during May's Preservation Month of events. If you know of a preservation project completed within the last year and would like to nominate it for an award, please call 860-570-0331 or e-mail [info@hartfordpreservation.org](mailto:info@hartfordpreservation.org) by March 1, 2007. Categories include new construction, community advocacy, neighborhood revitalization, building rehabilitation and stewardship.*

## A River Runs Through Hartford Who Knew?



Mary Rickel Pelletier, in blue jacket, directs the attention of participants in the Park River tour.

Photo: Tomas J. Nenortas

**M**ore than 60 people took an HPA-sponsored tour of the Park River in October, following the little-known section that runs between Farmington and Asylum avenues.

This is the final stretch of the north branch of the Park River before it goes underground at Farmington Avenue. The river does not re-emerge in Hartford until it meets the Connecticut River at the end of the Conlin Whitehead Highway.

The tour, led by Mary Rickel Pelletier, began at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Nook Farm. Looking at the floodplain to the west, it is not hard to imagine the river above ground as it flowed past the homes of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe — in fact, they were sited to provide views of the river. What remains today is the topography of meandering hills and valleys that suggests the river. This section of the river is underground.

To see the Park River above ground, the tour crossed Farmington Avenue, going north, and headed behind the buildings on the west side of Woodland Street. Here, again in the 19th century, were grand homes built to overlook the Park River from the hills above. During that time, sheep grazed along the banks of the river. Today, parking lots slope down almost to the river's edge in spots. In some places, the river invades the edges of the parking lots, depositing silt on the blacktop.

On the western side of the river, behind the Connecticut Historical Society headquarters and the University of Connecticut Law School, it is a wilder scene. Trees and brambles grow down the hill to the bank of the river. Small streamlets join the Park River here and there. The city disappears into the woods. It is hard to image that this river bank is in the middle of the city and its opposite bank is flanked by a series of parking lots. Here, one can appreciate the beauty that drew the builders of some of Hartford's grandest houses to its banks.

The number of people who attended this tour attests to the renewed interest in the Park River. If you are interested in learning more about the river, visit [www.parkriver.org](http://www.parkriver.org). 🍂

### Membership Dues

<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Household	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Preservation Friend	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Preservation Ally	\$150
<input type="checkbox"/> Preservation Advocate	\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Preservation Patron	\$500
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$1,000

## Join the Hartford Preservation Alliance

Name:

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Mail to: Hartford Preservation Alliance, 56 Arbor Street, Suite 406, Hartford, CT 06106  
*All contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

The ordinance will be administered by the city Planning Division, within the Department of Development Services. A consultant with a degree in historic preservation, Rebecca Parkin, has been hired by the city to help in the implementation of the ordinance, and it is expected that a full-time employee with experience in historical preservation will ultimately be added to the Planning Division staff.

Roger O'Brien, director of the Planning Division, described Hartford's historic architecture as "incredible" and "one of its defining features." "I am delighted," he said, "that we now have the tools in place that will allow us to build upon this heritage."

The HPO requires owners of property subject to the ordinance to obtain the approval of the Commission before demolishing any structure within a historic district and before obtaining a building permit to make exterior changes to any building in such a district, if the changes will be visible from the street. The ordinance does not apply to interior renovations or to exterior changes (such as repainting) that do not require a building permit. As a result, the ordinance is expected to have its greatest impact on demolitions and on siding, porch, roof and window repairs and replacements.

The Commission is required to follow the standards of the Secretary of the Interior (see box on page 7) and the new City of Hartford Design Guidelines. The guidelines, which were prepared by James Vance and Associates in consultation with an advisory committee, can be obtained in printed form from the City of Hartford or downloaded from [www.hartford.gov](http://www.hartford.gov).

The ordinance requires the Commission to consider economic feasibility in its review of applications and contains a procedure by which a property owner can limit any marginal additional cost resulting from compliance with the guidelines to 20% of the cost of the improvement. The ordinance also permits the Commission to grant hardship exemptions based on the owner's economic circumstances.

The HPO does not apply to demolition orders issued by the City under its health and safety powers; but it does require all city agencies, including the Building Department when it inspects unsafe buildings, to "give priority to the preservation of the city's historic architecture and character." It explicitly requires each city agency to treat demolition as

## Who Sits on the Historic Preservation Commission?

Under the Hartford Preservation Ordinance, the members of an existing preservation board — the Historic Properties Commission — will also serve as the members of the Historic Preservation Commission. At present, there are five members and one alternate. The members, their occupations and home neighborhoods are:

**Greg Secord**, executive director of Rebuilding Together Hartford Inc., Frog Hollow.

**Allen Ambrose**, architect with Ambrose Design Group, South Downtown.

**David Ransom**, architectural historian and author, South West Neighborhood.

**Lynn Ferrari**, vice-president for performance and analytics at Phoenix Investment Partners, Sheldon/Charter Oak.

**Jonathan Clark**, property manager and realtor, Asylum Hill.

**Catherine Conner**, retired, Grandview Terrace/South End.

Mr. Secord is chair of the Commission. Ms. Connor is an alternate.

"an alternative of last resort," to be used only if "other reasonable alternatives do not exist."

On December 14, the Hartford Preservation Alliance, in partnership with Hartford 2000 and the Hartford Public Library, sponsored a citywide workshop on the new HPO. HPA plans to follow-up early this year by making a series of presentations on the ordinance to each of the NRZ (neighborhood revitalization zone) committees affected by the ordinance.

Joining HPA, the library and Hartford 2000 as collaborators and presenters of the city-wide program were the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), the Department of Development Services (DDS) and Neighborhoods of Hartford, Inc. (NHI).

The long, three-year path to final adoption of this ordinance began in the fall of 2003, when the Council approved a resolution by Councilman Dr. Bob Painter calling on the city manager to develop a preservation ordinance. A task force chaired by former HPA President Greg Secord drafted a proposal, which was submitted to Mayor Perez in June 2004. It was adopted in modified form by the Council in May 2005, but with the proviso that it would not take effect until 30 days after design guidelines were approved by the Council.

Unexpected delays resulted in its taking well over a year for the guidelines to be completed. The ordinance includes a three-year sunset provision. As a result, the Council must re-approve the ordinance by December 2009 if it is to become permanent. ❁

For more information on the Hartford Preservation Ordinance, go to the HPA website at [www.hartfordpreservation.org](http://www.hartfordpreservation.org) or call HPA at 860-570-0331.

## Highlights of the Hartford Preservation Ordinance

The ordinance requires approval of the Hartford Preservation Commission before a property in a historic district can be:

- demolished
- altered in a manner that is visible from the street
- constructed

It applies only to:

- properties and districts on the National or State Register of Historic Places
- activities (alterations and new construction) that require a building permit

It does not apply to:

- interior renovations
- repainting and other alterations that do not require a building permit
- alterations to the rear of a building if they are not visible from the street



buildings and responded with substantial interim repairs to stabilize them. Full renovation is expected to begin soon.

Regrettably, a similar building at 49 Edgewood Street, not owned by CAC, was demolished by the city in September, shortly after a new owner bought it with the intention of rehabilitating it. HPA intervened in an effort to preserve the building. The owner, however, although willing, was unable to act quickly, and the city refused to delay action to give the owner more time.

### Saved: 902 Broad Street

In May, the city ordered the repair or demolition of this 1927 vacant apartment building in the Frog Hollow Historic District. HPA brought in structural engineer James Grant, whose analysis of the building helped convince both the city and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) that the building was structurally sound. He also helped devise an inexpensive way to stabilize the building, from which bricks had been falling. After SHPO rejected the use of state funds for demolition, the city assumed responsibility for the full mothballing of the building. The next step is to find a developer willing to rehabilitate the building.

### Saved: 87 Atwood Street

This six-family Perfect Six in the Asylum Hill Historic District has been boarded for many years. The city, citing safety concerns, decided to move forward on demolition. This time, it was the Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA) that stepped forward to take on the rehabilitation of the building. NINA, which has received preservation awards for its relocation of 47 Sigourney Street and its rehabilitation of buildings on Ashley and Garden streets, made the decision to incorporate 87 Atwood Street into its homeownership initiative and persuaded the city to pull back from its demolition plans. NINA has now purchased the tax liens on the building from the city and will be foreclosing the liens in order to get title to the property. It has also bought from the city a vacant lot next door to the building, which it will use for parking. ❀



Clockwise from upper left: 29 Edgewood Street, 19 Edgewood Street and 87 Atwood Street (photos: Kevin Flood), and 902 Broad Street (photo: W. Brendan Rudge).

The Hartford Preservation Alliance receives funding from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, in cooperation with the Connecticut Humanities Council. Funding also comes from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Surdna Foundation. Many others, including businesses and our members, have contributed to the operation of our organization, and we wish to thank them for their continued support.

## What are the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation?

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior has established 10 general principles to be followed in preserving the historic architectural character of buildings. They are:

- Retain the original use of the building if possible or provide a new use that minimizes changes to the building's essential historic characteristics.
- Preserve the distinguishing character of the property. Minimize removal or alteration of historic materials or architectural features.
- Recognize the building as a product of its time. Alterations should be appropriate to that time period but should not create a false impression that they are original.
- Retain changes to a property which have acquired historic significance in their own right.
- Preserve distinctive stylistic features and examples of skilled craftsmanship.
- Repair rather than replace deteriorated architectural features whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, match the old features in design, color, texture and materials.
- If chemical or physical treatments are necessary, use the gentlest means possible.
- Protect and preserve archeological resources.
- Design new additions, exterior alterations and new construction to be compatible in size, scale, color and material with the original building but do not try to disguise the fact that the addition or alteration is new.
- Design new additions so that, if removed in the future, the essential form of the historic property will not be impaired.

# Then



Photo: Tomas J. Nenortas Collection

South end residence located at 1 Meadow Street (now 5 Meadow Street). In 1907, it was home to the H.A. Jackman family.

*&* **Now**



Photo: Elyse Vernile

## Lost Hartford



Photo: Tomas J. Nenortas Collection

Can you identify this building? Notice the spire of Cathedral of Saint Joseph in the background, suggesting that this building is in the Asylum Hill area. Send your answer to [lktwine@hartfordpreservation.org](mailto:lktwine@hartfordpreservation.org). If it's drawn from the other entries, you will receive a copy of *Victorian Hartford*, a book by the HPA's Tomas J. Nenortas.

If you have an image you would like to share or donate to the HPA archives, please contact us.

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