

PRESERVATION FORUM

NOVEMBER 6, 2010



City of New Bedford Office of Planning
Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust
Fort Taber/Fort Rodman Historical Association
New Bedford Economic Development Council
New Bedford Historical Commission
New Bedford Historical Society
New Bedford Preservation Society
New Bedford Whaling Museum
New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park
Rotch-Jones-Duff House & Garden Museum
Waterfront Historic Area League

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Bedford has a long legacy of preserving its cultural and architectural heritage and using those resources to help chart its future. However, the preservation of those resources is a constant effort and many properties have challenges and risks associated with them. These risks vary from the potential loss of the historic context of a resource, to the loss of a resource's integrity, or to the loss of the resource itself—demolition being an irrevocable proposition.

The purpose of the forum was to bring together local residents to participate in a discussion of ways to better identify the challenges associated with the city's at-risk properties and the strategies necessary to inform and enhance future preservation planning.

This forum brought together local preservationists, as well as practicing professionals from around the state and region to exchange ideas and success stories, to share perspectives and solutions to preservation issues, and to foster cooperation and better collaboration within the city's preservation community.

The city's planning processes will actively concentrate on the identified priority resources, while continuing to address all at risk properties. The City will actively collaborate with the New Bedford Preservation Coalition, State and National Preservation Organizations, and all other appropriate partners to leverage the resources necessary to preserve significant resources.

As the City's Office of Planning begins to draft the Community Preservation Plan in 2011, the information gathered from the Preservation Forum will be incorporated into that document.

FORUM COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

PLANNING & OUTREACH

The New Bedford Preservation Coalition (NBPC) began the discussion of a local preservation forum in the spring of 2010, and planning began once the focus and format were determined. A date with little or no conflict was determined (the Ernestina Forum was held the week before the preservation forum) and potential panelists were contacted and confirmed.

In preparation of the Forum, the NBPC identified historic properties, sites and landscape features considered to be at some degree of risk either from neglect, abandonment, demolition, or misguided development. It was expected that certain properties may have been overlooked and were to be added as a result of Forum discussions. The resources included met some or all of the following criteria:

1. listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places;
2. located at pivotal sites in that they are visually prominent and/or that their location is an indicator for the future well-being (or decline) of a neighborhood;
3. endangered in that their survival may depend upon more than market forces or regulatory controls;
4. potential to benefit the community at large in terms of environmental/aesthetic contribution, historical value, social/cultural value, or economic development.

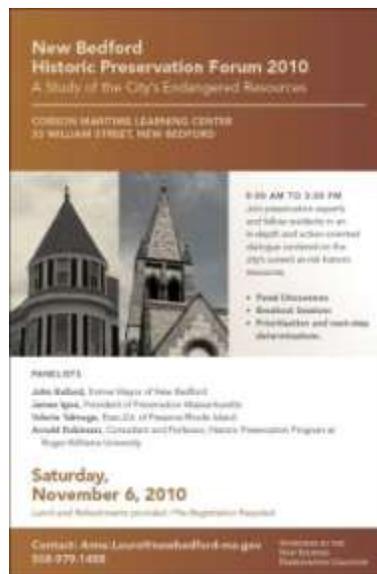
The resulting list of 50 + resources indicated that the properties were located city-wide and consisted of private, non-profit, and city owned properties.

The forum was designed to take a community-based approach at identifying New Bedford's most significant resources that are at risk for loss and determine strategies for their preservation. Due to the local nature of the forum subject matter, solicitation of participants focused on participation by residents of the city and adjoining towns active within the preservation community as well as those interested in neighborhood concerns.

A variety of methods was utilized to encourage participation. *Save the Date* postcards/invites were sent to the vast membership rosters of all the NBPC organizations and the social networking sites (facebook, twitter, Constant Contact) of the organizations were also used to spread the word. Neighborhood Organizations were contacted and a press release was sent to the media. Anne Louro, the city's Preservation Planner spoke on the local radio station twice in the week leading up to the event.

The forum subject matter was both broad in its relationship to preservation planning and specific in its discussion of certain historic significant resources. Therefore an orientation packet was developed to aid participants in their understanding of the various practices, ordinances, and programs of preservation, along with detailed information on each of the pre-determined historic resources to be studied.

Participants were encouraged to pre-register for the forum so that they would be able to review the orientation packet beforehand.



[..\Endangered Resource List.pdf](#)

[..\Preservation Forum Orientation Packet.pdf](#)

FORUM ACTIVITIES

The forum was held at the Corson Maritime Learning Center with over thirty participants. The day began with a welcome from Jen Nersesian, Superintendent of the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, and opening remarks from Mayor Scott Lang.

Mayor Lang set the tone for the day by noting that from the start of his administration, historic preservation "has been honored and practiced and woven into the fabric of the city's comprehensive planning activities." Mayor Lang affirmed his preservation policy by expressively claiming:

New Bedford must protect and honor its history, culture, and traditions; to do otherwise casts the uniqueness of the story of the people of New Bedford aside, and we will become part of the homogenous landscape of the later twentieth century America.

A panel discussion was held in the theatre and consisted of four practicing professionals from around the state and region, who exchanged ideas and success stories, as well as their perspectives and solutions to preservation issues.

The panelists were John Bullard, former Mayor of New Bedford and agent of WHALE; Valerie Talmage, Executive Director of Preserve Rhode Island; Erin Kelly, Assistant Director of Preservation Massachusetts; and Arnold Robinson, Consultant and Professor, Historic Preservation Program at Roger Williams University.

JOHN BULLARD

John posed ten (plus a bonus) questions he thought one needs to ask when doing historic preservation in New Bedford.

1. What's most important?
 - Because you can't save everything, therefore how do you determine where to focus your attention?
 - Pick your battles.
2. What's the threat and how much time do we have?
 - Some threats are more serious than others and some issues must be addressed immediately while others may have long-term solutions.
3. What's the least that can be done to achieve success?
 - With limited resources, one must consider how best to utilize them to determine success or failure.
4. What use will pay the bills?
 - *Original Use* if it makes sense, as it usually does in most residential buildings and in the case of the Zeiterion Theatre.
 - *Museums* very rarely are the best use; usually presented as a knee-jerk reaction for important buildings.
 - *Adaptive Use* through the means of adaptive rehabilitation. This often results in compromise; as it did in the example cases of the Corson, Baker-Robinson and Coalition for Buzzards Bay buildings.
5. Does it fit a bigger vision?
 - The preservation of an individual resource should be part of a larger plan.
6. Who brings what to the table?
 - Partnerships amongst different organizations are usually involved in historic preservation. Understanding each organization's strengths is important and everyone works in a "we" method.
7. Who's the best owner?
 - Must seek out the long-term solution.
8. What generates leverage?
 - Examples offered were that public funding investment in infrastructure attracts private investment; as it did in the Bedford-Waterfront Historic District.
 - A climate of change is powerful and success has a domino effect.
9. Is there a plan?
 - New Bedford is an authentic city with a working waterfront. Early in New Bedford's preservation activities there was a conscious decision to retain that authenticity.
10. Can we touch the Spirit?
 - Historic Preservation in New Bedford has brought tangible results that speak to the heart and "spirit" of the city such as the festivals held on the cobblestone streets in the historic district and the Zeiterion Theatre becoming the premiere performing arts venue of the South Coast.
11. Do we have the courage?
 - Historic Preservation consists of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. You got to take the leap,
 - "We are New Bedford...we are not generic...we are not just anywhere."

VALERIE TALMAGE

Valerie began her comments with a quote she attributed to a former colleague, Abe Wolfe who once said, "I'm a preservationist not because I'm interested in the past, but because I care about the future." Valerie followed up by

her own statement in which she pointed out that preservation is “really not about old buildings, it’s really about making the places we work, live and play; places we *want* to live, work and play.”

Valerie related that her experience in historic preservation has shown that preservationists work with little resources but are good at building constituencies and allocating minimal resources in order to make things happen. Preservation is often marginalized, belittled and pigeon-holed. Despite these challenges, in every successful New England town, historic preservation has been the single most effective program for economic revitalization and neighborhood stabilization.

Valerie emphasized that preservation’s paradigm must shift from regulation (you can’t do that) to catalyzing action by dreaming and visioning the places we want to live in and design programs for which to make that happen. Preservationists must work harder, in partnerships, with the few resources they have and place those efforts where they will have the biggest impact. Ideally a small effort will leverage big results. Preservation must build on those successes and consider the impact of choices by concentrating efforts on the “low hanging fruit.”

ARNOLD ROBINSON

Arnold has broad experience in the government, non-profit and private sectors of historic preservation. However he focused his comments on the private investor/developer’s role in a community’s historic preservation efforts. Arnold believes that a community must actively engage the private sector and be cognizant that the private sector has different motivations than non-profits and government; developers want to turn a profit.

According to Arnold there are items to consider when contemplating saving an endangered structure:

- loss of economic viability leads to physical deterioration;
- deterioration gets to a point where an owner cannot afford to repair;
- pressure occurs to alter a building’s character; or
- economic pressure to remove or replace with a new building and new use.

The government, in a regulatory role; the non-profit community, with its limited capacity; and the private sector, with its dollars can offset the above actions with certain actions.

There are five activities government and non-profits can participate in to save buildings and attract private development:

1. Ownership;
2. Regulation;
3. Property rights...setting policies that effect a buildings’ economic viability;
4. Incentives and disincentives...grants, tax credits, financing;
5. Information...potential owners, when knowing the allowed uses and appropriate preservation technologies available, will make the right actions.

Nationwide, communities have generally adopted economic and regulatory systems that encourage new development; Arnold questioned whether New Bedford has a system in place that encourages historic preservation? Because when these systems are utilized, proper preservation and enormous explosions of rehabilitation activity occur that are not dependent on government and non-profit entities.

Arnold used the example of Rhode Island, which for several years had a 30% State Rehabilitative Tax Credit in place, that when paired with the 20% Federal Rehabilitative Tax Credit, made preservation profitable for private developers. Once the state tax credit was removed, development immediately stopped in Rhode Island. The tax

removal also coincided with the nationwide economic downturn, however Maine adopted a 30% State Rehabilitative Tax Credit that same year and essentially all the developers relocated their efforts to Maine.

Local economic polices must encourage historic preservation and a community must be a part of the actions that effect state policies. Arnold presented three things that will help engage the private sector in historic preservation:

1. Examine current regulatory systems and how they affect buildings. Developers expect predictability in the case of uniform policies and speedy permitting.
2. Provide economic incentives.
3. Take pro-active actions on targeted properties, such as pre-development studies that identify best usages and proper preservation solutions, as well as packaging planning, zoning and environmental studies for developers.

Arnold ended his comments with a quote from Voltaire, who said, “The perfect is the enemy of the good.” Arnold expounded on this line by explaining that a community cannot always be perfect in preservation rehabilitation and when considering difficult projects, must ask itself; what are the optimal outcomes and what are the acceptable outcomes?

ERIN KELLY

Erin concentrated her comments on the tools, resources and best practices related to historic preservation. For those working in the preservation field it is important to identify the traditional resources available, but to also think out of the box. The greatest resource in a community is its people and the forging of professional partnerships; which New Bedford has done well in.

According to Erin, one of the most effective tools, both locally and statewide, has been the use of the 20% State Rehabilitative Tax Credit which can be paired with the 20% Federal Rehabilitative Tax Credit. Over the last six years, the seventy five million dollars awarded in state tax credits has leveraged over one billion dollars in private investment. These tax credits have been the most useful and highly recognized preservation tool utilized by the private sector. Many of New Bedford’s mill rehabilitations have taken advantage of this tax credit and city officials have collaborated with Preservation Massachusetts in their lobbying efforts to raise the state’s fifty million dollar cap.

Other important preservation tools are advocacy and education; tools well utilized in New Bedford. As such, Erin lauded the Lang administration’s support of historic preservation. Erin went on to state that Preservation Mass uses New Bedford as a model for other communities to emulate and that New Bedford understands that “preservation is about people for people.”

BREAK OUT SESSIONS

Participants were divided into four groups, each led by a trained facilitator to guide discussions related to the



forum’s objectives. The panelists also participated in the break out group session, either by directly joining a group or by floating the room acting as an informational resource.

Two consecutive break-out sessions were scheduled. The first session focused on the pre-determined list of endangered resources and the prioritization of those resources. In the first exercise of that session, participants were asked to answer why they thought preservation is important to New Bedford. The second exercise had group participants

review the criteria for consideration to be utilized when evaluating each resource; which were:

- National Register Eligibility
- Location
- Endangered Status

The participants, through consensus made any additions, and for the third exercise, through the placement of dots by individual group members, determined the group's ten prioritized resources. Those ten resources were written and displayed on a flip chart to be presented at the afternoon report-out.

After a brief break for lunch, a second session commenced during which the groups determined the tools, resources, obstacles, and next actions for the chosen ten resources.



REPORT-OUT

At the end of the day, each group presented their ten (or more for two groups) prioritized resources for preservation to the entire group, including the panelists and Mayor Lang. Below is the chosen resources, displayed in alphabetical order.

GROUP: YELLOW	GROUP: RED	GROUP: BLUE	GROUP: GREEN
Ahabeth Achim Synagogue	Cape Verdean Vets Hall	Ahabeth Achim Synagogue	Civil Defense Building
Armory	C.E. Beckman's	Armory	Ernestina
C.E. Beckman's	Cemeteries	C.E. Beckman's	Fort Taber
Ice House & Revere Copper	Civil Defense Building	First Baptist Church	John Howland Jr. House
Mill Buildings	Congdon-Lucas House	Fort Taber	Mariner's Home
Orpheum Theatre	Ernestina	John Howland Jr. House	Orpheum Theatre
Palmer's Island	Fort Taber	Mariner's Home	Palmer's Island
Parks	Parks	Orpheum Theatre	Parks
Seaman's Bethel	Seaman's Bethel	Seaman's Bethel	Seaman's Bethel
Vacant Lots	Zeiterion Theatre	St. Anthony Church	Wamsutta Club
		Zeiterion Theatre	Zeiterion Theatre
		512 Kempton Street	

As expected there was duplication of resources amongst the group's choices. Below is the breakdown according to the quantity of choice.

RESOURCE	#
Seaman's Bethel	4
C.E. Beckman's	3
Fort Taber	3
Orpheum Theatre	3
Parks	3
Zeiterion Theatre	3
Ahabeth Achim Synagogue	2
Armory	2
Civil Defense Building	2
Ernestina	2
John Howland Jr. House	2
Mariner's Home	2
Palmer's Island	2
Cape Verdean Vets Hall	1
Cemeteries	1
Congdon-Lucas House	1
First Baptist Church	1
Ice House & Revere Copper	1
Mill Buildings	1
St. Anthony Church	1
Wamsutta Club	1
Vacant Lots	1
512 Kempton Street	1



SUMMARY FINDINGS

The groups cited important attributes for each resource and suggested several tools and resources that could be examined for the preservation of each resource.

The participants also addressed which tools and resources they felt the city and its preservation partners should either utilize more aggressively or explore as new instruments for preservation.

The question: *Why Preservation is important in New Bedford?* was posed to the participants as a way to frame some of their decision-making.

The vigorous discussions resulted in the following findings:

Seaman's Bethel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic Structure Report underway • Needs to become a full park partner to qualify for future funding 	Orpheum Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomination to National Register • Seek partners
C.E. Beckman's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sited Within 40C District which provides protection • Eligible for federal and state tax credits • Located in the National Historic Park • One of the oldest buildings in the National Park • Direct ties to the Whaling Industry and continues to serve the maritime industry • NPS is currently seeking funding for a Historic Structure Report 	Zeiterion Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City-owned • Long-term plan in place • Within a National Register District • Receives funding from state
Fort Taber <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of revenue generating uses that would go directly towards preservation • Look at other models for ideas 	Parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for creation of Friends Groups in all the Parks • Tap into funding for Health and Wellness initiatives
John Howland Jr. House <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently purchased by WHALE & stabilized 	Ernestina <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to be revenue generating and use oriented • Requires change of the controlling structure
Civil Defense Building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive for adaptive reuse • Within a National Register District • Attractive to private development 	Armory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively seek appropriate end users
Congdon-Lucas House <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City-owned • Phased restoration on-going 	Vacant Lots <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key lots to use as a master plan for determining appropriate green space or redevelopment course
Ahabeth Achim Synagogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize a preservation easement 	Palmer's Island <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with Cape Wind for rehabilitation • City recently received a \$500,000 grant
Cemeteries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to be integrated more fully into telling the story of NB • Nationally significant 	Ice House & Revere Copper <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek National Register nomination
	Mariner's Home <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to become a full park partner to qualify for future funding • Needs a full rehabilitation

Tools & Resources

- partner with the Association for Preservation Technology;
- partner with Universities that have Historic Preservation and History Programs;
- utilize technology and building programs in area high school and vocational schools;
- arbor protection: register important historic trees;
- continue registering properties to the State and National Register of Historic Places;
- utilize Preservation Easements;
- full documentation of significant buildings;
- implement a Property Option Tax Credit for historic rehabilitation;
- implement the Community Preservation Act;
- better enforcement of current ordinances; including monetary fines;
- emphasize public advocacy and education;
- team with mandated community service programs;
- “swat team” approach to low hanging fruit;
- Office of Housing & Community Development fund more historic preservation utilizing appropriate rehabilitation methods (no vinyl siding);
- capitalize private development for rehabilitation of mills, schools, armory and tenements;
- tax relief for preservation rehabilitation;
- Preserve America program;
- mothball buildings that do not have a clear end use;

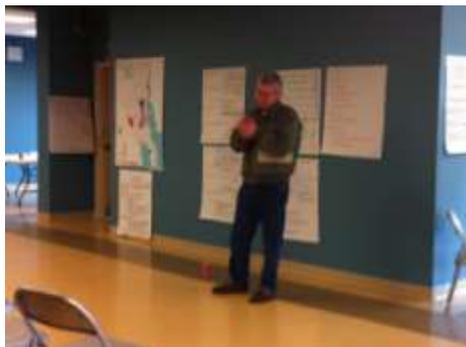
Why Preservation is important in New Bedford?

- culturally important;
- a means to pass on history and culture to future generations;
- aesthetically important;
- represents “our collective identity”;
- economic benefit to city;
- living timeline;
- makes New Bedford “not just anywhere”;
- catalyst for tourism and economic development;
- enhances civic pride;
- a green endeavor;
- enhances quality of life;
- maintains “human scale” neighborhoods;
- removes urban blight;
- saves green space;
- fosters pride;
- plays to New Bedford’s strength of history;
- affects the average resident;
- repurposing buildings is environmentally friend;



At the end of the Report-Out, Mayor Lang warmly thanked the groups and panelists for their participation and commitment to the community. Mayor Lang took the opportunity to note that many of the properties identified by the participants currently had preservation activity directed towards them. He used the example of Palmer's Island which recently received a \$500,000 grant, and the John Howland Jr. House, which WHALE recently purchased and is in the midst of stabilizing. Mayor Lang reiterated his commitment to preservation that leverages economic development, continues to develop the cultural landscape, and enhances quality of life in the neighborhoods.

City Preservation Planner, Anne Louro pointed out that the theme of religious institutions and the challenges related to the maintenance of their significant religious buildings also emerged from the Forum conversations. This



topic has recently come forward as a priority for the Office of Planning and WHALE, as numerous local religious institutions have reached out to both entities for information, support, and technical assistance. Due to this need, the New Bedford Preservation Coalition will be partnering with Preservation Mass to host a Religious Institution Preservation Workshop this year that will provide practical, useful advice on preserving and maintaining religious buildings.

Ms. Louro also briefly discussed how the information gathered from the Forum would be utilized by the City in its planning activities as well as by the New Bedford Preservation Coalition partners.

As a follow-up to the completion of the City's Master Plan, one of the first initiatives to be completed by the Office of Planning will be the Community Preservation Plan. This Preservation Plan will incorporate the information from the forum and will gather greater public input through future community meetings. The development of a Community Master Plan will build upon the past successes of the preservation community and pursue a clear strategy for the continuation of identification, protection, and recognition of the city's important historic resources.

The New Bedford Preservation Coalition (NBPC) will continue its important role in engaging the community in important cultural and preservation topics; either through workshops, forums, or programming. The NBPC will also collaborate with the Office of Planning in the development of the Community Preservation Plan and continue to leverage its partner's experience and expertise to support city-wide preservation efforts.

New Bedford Historic Preservation Forum 2010

A Study of the City's Endangered Resources

CORSON MARITIME LEARNING CENTER
33 WILLIAM STREET, NEW BEDFORD



9:00 AM TO 3:00 PM

Join preservation experts and fellow residents in an in-depth and action-oriented dialogue centered on the city's current at-risk historic resources.

- Panel Discussions
- Breakout Sessions
- Prioritization and next-step determinations.

PANELISTS

John Bullard, former Mayor of New Bedford

James Igoe, President of Preservation Massachusetts

Valerie Talmage, Exec.Dir. of Preserve Rhode Island

Arnold Robinson, Consultant and Professor, Historic Preservation Program at Roger Williams University

**Saturday,
November 6, 2010**

Lunch and Refreshments provided / Pre-Registration Required

Contact: Anne.Louro@newbedford-ma.gov
508-979-1488

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PRESERVATION COALITION

Nov. forum to set goals for saving historic properties

By CHARIS ANDERSON
canderson@s-t.com
September 01, 2010 12:00 AM

NEW BEDFORD — The New Bedford Preservation Coalition will hold a forum in November to help set preservation goals for many of the city's historical properties as part of an effort to target limited resources to where they're most needed, according to a city official.

The event was organized in part to address concerns raised in the wake of the June fire that ultimately claimed the former Frates Funeral Home on County Street, according to Anne Louro, the city's preservation planner.

The coalition is a group of public and nonprofit organizations that have historical preservation as part of their core mission.

Louro on Tuesday updated the City Council's Committee on Appointments and Briefings on the event as part of a discussion around the possibility of creating an inventory of the city's historic buildings, a motion filed by Ward 5 Councilor Jane Gonsalves.

"I'm worried about the status of these buildings, especially those that are empty," said Gonsalves. "How do we prevent them from going up in smoke?"

About 50 properties will be listed during the forum and short-, medium- and long-term goals will be set for each structure, according to Louro.

However, the city is already working to track its historic properties on several fronts, said Louro.

There are 15 National Register districts in New Bedford, and an effort is under way to bring a 16th district — the area around St. Anthony of Padua on Acushnet Avenue — online within a year, said Louro.

The city recently received a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission to inventory about 80 historic properties along Acushnet Avenue between Coggeshall Street and Nash Road, including St. Anthony's, said Louro.

As part of that process, detailed information — who built each building, who lived in it, the structure's significance to its broader neighborhood, etc. — will be gathered about each structure, according to Louro.

The city recently completed a detailed inventory of its cemeteries, said Louro, and also maintains a database of all vacant properties.

One of the goals of the November forum is to identify challenges or gaps the city may be facing and to learn about what other communities have done to overcome those challenges, said Louro.

Gonsalves said she would return to the matter after the November event.

Forum discusses preserving NB history

By Dan McDonald

dmcDonald@s-t.com

November 07, 2010 12:00 AM

NEW BEDFORD — History equals money.

That was the bottom line at the all-day historic preservation brainstorming session on Saturday. Dozens of community leaders gathered in the Corson Maritime Learning Center on William Street to discuss how to preserve some of the most storied locations in the city and attempted to assess what properties and buildings were in the most dire need of attention.

The list the attendees had to draw from was lengthy; it included about 40 properties that form a tangible backbone of New Bedford history.

An 1860s-era ice house on North Front Street is the only surviving ice house in the city. Part of this structure has already been illegally demolished.

The Palmer's Island lighthouse suffers from exposure, vandalism and a lack of public access. Mayor Scott W. Lang told the crowd Saturday the city has received \$500,000 to restore its lighthouses.

The Orpheum Theatre represents one of the last remaining buildings of the once vibrant Water Street nightlife scene.

The Civil Defense Building, built in 1893 at 109 Hillman St., is a former fire station that is in poor condition and has a deteriorated roof.

Ahavath Achim Synagogue, almost 120 years after it opened, is scheduled to close at the end of this year.

Seamen's Bethel, said Lang, constitutes "a red light on the dashboard."

That building is "rotting away as we speak," said Lang.

Restoration of the Schooner Ernestina is "absolutely urgent," said Lang.

"If you have a funding source, let us know," said Lang. "Funding sources are key."

Anne Louro, the city's preservation planner, agreed.

"Most of it comes down to funding," said Louro.

Many of the properties are owned by nonprofits that do not have the financial resources to undertake expensive rehab projects, Louro said, adding that many solutions will have to involve private sector partnerships.

"You can't just rely on government subsidies or nonprofits raising funds," Louro said.

The discussion focusing on how best to preserve and restore such sites was wide-ranging. Partnerships with universities, the Community Preservation Act, and tax increment financing plans were all broached.

Chuck Smiler, who runs Captain Haskill's Octagon House, a bed and breakfast on the corner of Union and Cottage streets, said "ultimately it has to be the use and the users who justify the money" invested in any historical building.

Smiler said the local community does not always realize the historical richness of New Bedford, which he suggested could be an economic driver.

"My guests come from all around the world," Smiler said. "They're highly sophisticated and they take in the history of New Bedford."

Referencing the list of historical sites that need some work, Laurie Robertson-Lorant described attempts to prioritize as agonizing.

"How can we possibly choose?" she asked.