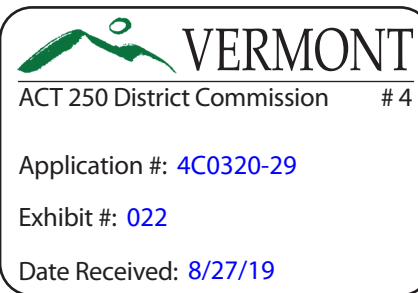


Act 250 Request for Party Status, in light of the special circumstances of this case
Request for a public hearing

To: District Commission

From: Sara Dillon, 51 Horace Road, Belmont, Massachusetts 02478
dillon.saraa@gmail.com

Date: August 27, 2019



It comes as a shock to me that Saint Michael's College has requested permission to demolish the first and foundational building on its campus in Colchester, Vermont, built by the original Edmundite founders. As you are aware, institutions of higher education enjoy nonprofit status and owe the public a responsibility to act as guardians of the traditions upon which they were built. The vast majority of institutions of higher education in our country strive to preserve their visual heritage; it is unthinkable that other similarly situated colleges would tear down their most important buildings, especially after allowing neglect to set in for decades.

I am myself a 1977 graduate of Saint Michael's College. I was the class valedictorian, achieving top honors in my year. More importantly, my father, James Tyndall Dillon (deceased in 1994), was a 1932 graduate of the college. He always told wonderful stories about the priests who had founded the college and of the early days of Saint Michael's. He was a devoted alumnus of the college, and worked tirelessly in a volunteer capacity to promote the interest of the college. Although I have not had the time or resources to maintain a very close relationship with the college, I was recognized as a member of the Saint Michael's Academic Hall of Fame.

Founders Hall is a plain but strikingly beautiful building, the heart of the college because it represent the original vision of the intrepid priests who founded it. I understand that the Edmundite order is now sadly reduced in size; the average age of the remaining priests is advanced. Although I was unaware of this, there have been some staff members in the college in recent years who have denigrated Founders Hall and called it poorly built. This is clearly not the case, and this sentiment reflects only the fact that the building was allowed to fall into neglect. All older buildings require care and conservation. Is this one key building truly beyond the power of Saint Michael's College to maintain?

There are many things the college could do with the building—turn it into better appointed offices, make a small museum honoring the founders and their courage. If the funds are not there presently, the building could be secured and its future debated more widely. Once it is gone, it is gone forever. Special fund raising could be carried out. To my knowledge, alumni of the college were only recently notified

through a one page explanation (of sorts) in the latest alumni magazine. This is grossly inadequate.

My argument is that this terrible decision affects not only Saint Michael's, but also the built heritage of the State of Vermont. The Saint Michael's College authorities have built on a large scale over the past twenty years—student centers, classrooms and dormitories. Surely this one building could have been saved? It strains belief that it is vital to the college to knock it down; it truly feels contemptuous of the visual heritage of the institution. And the renown Vermont planning law surely has scope and discretion to require it to be saved.

It may be that those who remember the old days at Saint Michael's are largely gone, and that the current administration of the college is not interested in this heritage. However, I would argue that they have a responsibility to the past that allowed the college to survive. Founders Hall is the main visual evidence of these past efforts. Surely the state of Vermont would not allow UVM to demolish a key building on the university green; in what way is this different?

I understand that I am not a conventional interested party under state law. However, what college really has neighbors who can be considered interested parties? This is not a question of building something that could generate traffic or noise—but rather of demolishing a building that cannot be replaced. In that sense, if not geographically, I am surely an interested party in the deeper sense of the word. I urge you to consider the historic, emotional and religious importance of this building and allow me the opportunity to speak before a public hearing.

With my sincere thanks, Sara Dillon, Professor of Law, Suffolk University, Boston