



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240



October 4, 2019

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

PROPERTY: **Alvarez Block, 114 Main Street, Montpelier, VT**
PROJECT NUMBER: **39783**

Dear [REDACTED]:

I have concluded my review of your appeal of the April 1, 2019 Decision of the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, denying your request for certification of significance for the property referenced above. The appeal was made in accordance with Department of the Interior regulations (36 C.F.R. Part 67) governing certifications for Federal income tax incentives for historic preservation as specified in the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. I want to thank you, [REDACTED], for meeting with me on June 12, 2019, and for providing a detailed account of the project.

After carefully considering the complete record and all available documentation, including the additional information you provided as part of your appeal, and from [REDACTED], I have determined that at the time of your Part 1 – Evaluation of Significance application, dated January 7, 2019, the Alvarez Block could be deemed to contribute to the Montpelier Historic District in which it is located. Accordingly, the National Register’s April 1, 2019 Decision, denying “certified historic structure” status for this building, is hereby reversed.

The Standards for Evaluating Significance Within Registered Historic Districts, incorporated in the regulations cited above (36 C.F.R. 67.5), define a building which contributes to the significance of a district as “one which by location, settings, materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and association adds to the district’s sense of time and place and historical development.” Conversely, a building that lacks significance within a historic district is one that does not contribute to the special qualities or characteristics that identify the place, or is one where particular features “have been so altered or have so deteriorated that the overall integrity of the building has been irretrievably lost.” A contributing building must date from the historic district’s defined period of significance and retain historic integrity from that time period.

The Alvarez Block is a two-story, wood frame (but with a brick party wall and a brick alley façade), commercial building with two storefronts on the first floor, three modern windows in historic openings

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and weatherboard siding on the second, and a simple wooden cornice. Originally constructed c. 1870, the structure's form and details have changed over time. Evidence includes a c. 1890 photograph which shows that the building had three stories plus a mansard roof. The first floor had two storefronts with a unified cornice above them. The second and third floors each had three paired windows with hoods. The mansard had three dormers, with its overhang supported on paired brackets. Another, c. 1950, photograph shows that the mansard dormers had been removed, along with many of the original architectural details on the façade. The two storefronts remained, one the offices for the *Times-Argus* newspaper, a longstanding tenant in the building, and the other a market, but the three paired windows on the second and third floors had each been replaced with one wide window without a hood, the original wood siding and corner boards had been replaced with weatherboard siding, and the bracketed mansard cornice had been replaced with a simple cornice. In 1971, a fire resulted in the loss of the third floor and mansard roof, but the building below that level retained its pre-1950 configuration and materials, and the new cornice above the second floor replicated the mansard cornice visible in the c. 1950 photograph. Both the *Times-Argus* newspaper and the market returned after the fire damage was repaired. The building—and its two prime tenants—has changed little over the forty-eight years since it took its current form.

In its review, the National Register concluded that, “*With a substantially reduced and rebuilt façade, 116 Main Street would not be recognized by an historical contemporary, and, therefore does not meet the critical aspects of integrity for an historic district.*” Accordingly, the National Register determined that the Alvarez Block was not a “certified historic structure.”

In my review, I first looked at how the Alvarez Block was assessed in the Montpelier Historic District nomination, which was first listed in 1978 and revised and enlarged in 2018. The 1978 nomination acknowledged the 1971 fire that “*necessitated the removal of the third floor and mansard roof*” but nevertheless listed the building as a contributing property. The 2018 revisions to the nomination included additional architectural description of the Alvarez Block and its continued historic association with the *Times-Argus* newspaper. Although neither nomination evaluated the building in regard to its c. 1890 appearance, I considered whether the overall integrity of the Alvarez Block, in either its c. 1890 configuration or its c. 1950 configuration, had been irretrievably lost.

With regard to the issue of the building's integrity for its c. 1890 appearance, the brick party wall and brick alley facade are the most significant remaining features because they pre-date the city ordinance mandating masonry fire separation between buildings in the downtown area. However, by the 1950s remodel, the building had lost the elaborate detailing of the original mansard, dormers and street façade, the paired windows on the street façade had been combined into larger windows, and the storefronts had been modified. I have determined that, although the brick walls remain, there is little else to convey the c. 1890s appearance of the building, and thus it has lost integrity from that era.

With regard to the issue of the building's integrity for its c. 1950 appearance, I have determined that, although the building was truncated by the 1971 fire, it has retained sufficient integrity as to its c. 1950 remodel configuration, as cited by both the 1978 nomination and the 2018 revision, to contribute to the significance of the district. I agree that its truncated form is dramatically different from its pre-fire, c. 1950 appearance, and would likely be noticed by a historical contemporary, however a historical contemporary would still likely recognize the building's substantially intact first and second floors, the newspaper office and the market storefronts, from the c. 1950 period.

Moreover, despite the Alvarez Block not having been evaluated for individual significance, its retention of its current form for forty-eight years is sufficient time to acquire significance in its own right, especially considering its historic association with the *Times-Argus* newspaper and market, as well as the surrounding commercial neighborhood.

In this case, I have determined that the 1966 end date for the period of significance for the historic district set in 2018 is not relevant because the building had already been listed as contributing to the district in the 1978 nomination and the 2018 revision. Both considered the building's c. 1950s configuration, a remodel occurring clearly within the period of significance, to be sufficiently intact as to contribute to the significance of the district, despite the fire's known impacts to the building.

Accordingly, I have determined that the Alvarez Block retains sufficient integrity of location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and association to add to the Montpelier Historic District's sense of time and place and historical development, and consequently find that it contributes to the significance of the district, and thus is a "certified historic structure" for purposes of Federal tax laws.

As Department of the Interior regulations provide, my decision is the final administrative decision with respect to the National Register's April 1, 2019 Decision regarding certification of significance. A copy of this decision will be provided to the Internal Revenue Service. Questions concerning the specific tax consequences of this decision, or interpretations of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 should be addressed to the appropriate office of the Internal Revenue Service.

Sincerely,



John A. Burns, FAIA, FAPT
Chief Appeals Officer
Cultural Resources

cc: VT SHPO
IRS

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