

Here are Utah's 'most endangered' historic buildings and places

With Abravanel Hall and the Fifth Ward LDS meetinghouse grabbing recent headlines, Preservation Utah points to other landmarks in jeopardy.

By TONY SEMERAD

The Salt Lake Tribune

Treasures such as Abravanel Hall and the Fifth Ward Latter-day Saint meetinghouse, preservationists warn, aren't the only historic buildings in the Beehive State to find themselves in harm's way.

But with a swell of new attention and support for those Salt Lake City landmarks grabbing recent headlines, Preservation Utah issued its more detailed list of the state's most endangered notable buildings and places.

Whether in direct danger of demolition or menaced by neglect, future development, natural disasters or other factors, the 17 buildings or sites in five counties all need residents living in surrounding communities and neighborhoods to advocate on their behalf, said the nonprofit group's executive director, Brandy Strand.

"People want to know about these places, because once they're gone, we cannot get them back," Strand said. "We're losing these spaces throughout Utah right now, and it's time for people to step up and get involved." Strand said as May unfolds, Preservation Utah will ask the public to suggest additional landmarks considered to be in jeopardy, for inclusion on its tally.

Abravanel Hall and Japantown

Recent negotiations toward locating a

new entertainment district in downtown Salt Lake City to help boost a sports arena — playing host to the NBA's Utah Jazz and the state's new NHL franchise — have raised suggestions that the 45-year-old Abravanel Hall might be demolished.

The first major public airing of those plans, held Tuesday before the City Council, drew fierce support for saving the current Utah Symphony home at 123 W. South Temple, considered a cultural and architectural gem since it opened in 1979.

Preservation Utah said those same talks also threaten to overwhelm plans to refurbish the nearby block of 100 South called Japantown.

There are only a few remnants left of a once-thriving enclave of Asian immigrants and culture along that block of the city after Japantown got mostly wiped out by construction of the Salt Palace Convention Center in the mid-1960s.

"Both Abravanel Hall and Japantown represent more than just structures; they embody Salt Lake City's collective memory," Preservation Utah wrote on its website. "As the city navigates its path forward, it must heed the lessons of history and recognize the value of preserving its cultural heritage for future generations."

First Ward LDS meetinghouse

Public reaction to the illegal partial demolition of the Fifth Ward last Easter became



TRENT NELSON The Salt Lake Tribune

The Wells Ward LDS meetinghouse in Salt Lake City is shown in May 2023.



MARK EDGINGTON The Salt Lake Tribune

The historic Washington County Courthouse in St. George is shown in June 2023.



Clockwise from top left, the most endangered buildings in the state, according to Preservation Utah: West High School, Abravanel Hall, Old Town trading post, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, and the Old Town neighborhood in Park City.

"absolutely instrumental," Strand said, in the city's urgent move to save it, fine the owner and require the historic structure's restoration.

It also landed the 114-year-old red-brick former Latter-day Saint meetinghouse at 740 S. 300 West on the agency's list of eight landmarks and neighborhoods in Salt Lake County deemed to be in danger.

A spokesperson for Mayor Erin Mendenhall said fines continue to accrue against the property owner after city officials confirmed the partial demolition went ahead without any city permits.

West High School

Preservation Utah said of four options for renovating the century-old high school on Salt Lake City's west side, only one fully preserves the building.

The group added that it recognized the historic school at 241 N. 300 West was near or past its prime as a teaching facility and that its classrooms needed updating but said it believed "these facilities can be added to the campus without demolishing the historic structure's key elements."

LDS Wells Ward

Experts for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day have declared the building unsalvageable without demolishing three-quarters of it and rebuilding at an estimated cost of \$5 million, Preservation Utah said. It and the larger 2.23-acre Liberty Wells Center site, 707 S. 400 East, have since been donated for construction of affordable housing.

But as a longtime community hub, the chapel deserves saving, Preservation Utah said. "Its unique style, combined with the structure's importance to the community and to the LDS faith, make it a priority to preserve."

Our Lady of Lourdes

The Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City put Our Lady of Lourdes at 670 S. 1100 East and the adjacent Judge Memorial High School campus up for sale last year as part of larger plans to consolidate some of its facilities on parish property near St. Ann Catholic Church, 2119 S. 400 East, in South Salt Lake.

Church officials have since reportedly withdrawn the properties from the market, but Our Lady of Lourdes' future is still uncertain.

"Parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, many neighbors, community partners and alumni of Judge Memorial would like to keep their historic church," Preservation Utah wrote. And while the chapel is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is under no historic protections.

Salt Lake City's west side

City neighborhoods such as Rose Park, Glendale, Poplar Grove, Fairpark, People's Freeway and Westpointe boast a rich range of architectural styles and diverse histories, often as the only places low-income residents and people of color were allowed to

live in Utah's capital. But the west side has no formally recognized historic districts — in contrast to the east side — and many of its landmarks and neighborhoods now face dire threats, Preservation Utah said, from aging homes and infrastructure, looming development and a lack of investment.

The city's historic districts

Salt Lake City currently has 16 of these locally designated districts, and while they do offer protections for some historic buildings from demolition, the city has still allowed 51 sites to be torn down, Preservation Utah said, or allowed authorized "insensitive alterations" to historic properties.

"Without concerted efforts to safeguard these districts," the group said, "the city risks losing invaluable pieces of its identity and eroding the sense of community that has flourished for generations."

Homes and buildings in Summit County

Preservation Utah decried that Park City has lost more than a third of all its ski-era buildings, including the near-disappearance of traditional A-frame homes. It urged the city to extend protections to structures from the era, as well as some of Park City's notable mining landmarks.

The group praised efforts by Park City preservation groups to raise money to stabilize and rehabilitate portions of the historic Thayne Headframe building, the Silver King Headframe building and the Silver King Mill.

Logan and St. George

Preservationists singled out Logan's Main Street and Washington County's Administration Building and Pioneer Courthouse in St. George as also being worthy of more protections.

Logan has lost two Main Street buildings and two more are in limbo, Preservation Utah said, urging adaptive reuse of other vintage buildings as a way to keep them.

The old sandstone Washington County Courthouse on St. George Boulevard, the group said, has been unoccupied in recent years and has slowly eroded for decades, while the Administration Building, located at 197 E. Tabernacle, is now at risk of demolition within five years.

San Juan County's Oljato Trading Post

Built in 1906, this historic trading post south of Bluff on the western edge of Oljato-Monument Valley has been closed since 2009 and has fallen into disrepair. Preservation Utah said. Though some work was done in 2020 to shore it up, the site was on the National Trust's 2021 list of America's Most Endangered Places.

"Further work must be done to preserve the building," the group said, noting that advocates continue to raise money for its restoration.

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