



# PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

*for greater philadelphia*

July 6, 2020

Robert Thomas, Chairman  
Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director  
Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

RE: St. Laurentius Church, 1600-06 E. Berks Street, Philadelphia, PA

Dear Bob and Jon,

I am writing in reference to the emergency application that was submitted to the Philadelphia Historical Commission on July 3, 2020 for the complete demolition of the above-referenced property. This property was added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 2015 on the basis of its history, architecture and importance to the Polish Catholic community in Philadelphia.

We understand that this matter appears on the agenda of the monthly meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission scheduled for this Friday, July 10. As we continue our review of the demolition application, we believe that the Commission should consider the following questions:

- Why was this application not referred first to the Architectural Committee, which exists in part to offer technical expertise in the review of applications that seek to alter or demolish historic properties?
- Why is no mention made in either the application or in the attached engineering reports of the expenditure of \$135,000 by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia last summer to address the building's structural problems? (This was reported in January on Inquirer.com <https://www.inquirer.com/news/st-laurentius-church-fishtown-sells-new-developer-humberto-fernandini-archdiocese-preservation-20200115.html>).
- What impact did the above-referenced repairs have in addressing the issues detailed in the application?
- What evidence of structural failure was observed by the Harman Group and Thornton Tomasetti that is new since last summer's repairs by the Archdiocese?
- Why does the application call for the complete demolition of this historic property if the engineering reports only address structural problems with one or both steeples?
  - In fact, neither engineer's report included with the application says that complete demolition is necessary.
- Why is no financial information provided about the cost of either stabilizing the steeples and/or removing them to abate the purported dangerous condition?

We recognize that this building is part of a dense urban neighborhood. We are aware of the fact that prior inspections have revealed structural concerns. We believe that public safety comes first and that the owner and the City of Philadelphia must ensure that public safety is ensured at all times. But the rush to seek a demolition permit with barely a week's notice and incomplete documentation requires that the foregoing questions, and others that the Commission may deem to ask, need to be answered before the fate of this irreplaceable historic property is decided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul Steinke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Paul Steinke  
Executive Director

## St. Laurentius

McClure, Matthew N. <McClure@ballardspahr.com>

Tue 7/7/2020 10:34 AM

**To:** Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>; Laura Dipasquale <Laura.Dipasquale@Phila.gov>; David Perri <David.Perri@phila.gov>; Leonard Reuter <Leonard.Reuter@Phila.gov>  
**Cc:** Janice B. Vacca P.E., LEED, AP (jvacca@harmangroup.com) <jvacca@harmangroup.com>; Mark A. Coggin (MCoggin@ThorntonTomasetti.com) <MCoggin@ThorntonTomasetti.com>; Humberto Fernandini <humbertofernandini@yahoo.com>; Beverly, Devon <BeverlyD@ballardspahr.com>; Gest, David <GestD@ballardspahr.com>

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Dr. Farnham, Ms. Dipasquale, Commissioner Perri and Attorney Reuter:

On a call yesterday, Paul Steinke of the Preservation Alliance asked why the ownership could not simply remove the top portions of the steeples to reduce the load and thereby save the majority of the steeples? This is a reasonable question. Please see the below email from Mark Coggin, PE of Thornton Tomasetti responding to this question (which we have already conveyed to the Preservation Alliance). Jan Vacca, PE will also be present at the July 10 Commission meeting to answer this question if it comes up.

Please include the below email into the record.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

All the best,

Matt

**Matthew N. McClure**

Ballard Spahr LLP

1735 Market Street, 51st Floor

Philadelphia, PA 19103-7599

Direct 215.864.8771

Fax 215.864.8999

mcclure@ballardspahr.com

www.ballardspahr.com

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**From:** Coggin, Mark <Mcoggin@ThorntonTomasetti.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 7, 2020 10:19 AM

**To:** McClure, Matthew N. (Phila) <McClure@ballardspahr.com>

**Cc:** Jan Vacca <jvacca@harmangroup.com>

**Subject:** 1600 Berks

 **EXTERNAL**

Matt

I understand you were asked about the potential for removing the upper portion of the steeples as a method of reducing weight on the structure to potential preserve the towers. In response, I offer the following:

The timber structure is in good condition however it is not tied to the masonry and it has never been tied to the masonry. Removing timber framed steeple is not going to resolve the issue of deteriorated masonry.

The masonry towers achieved their strength and stability from the box shape, think of it as a strong tube. The timber structure sits independently inside of that tube. Only the base timbers bear on the masonry structure. The masonry has cracks at the corners of the towers which significantly reduce the strength of the tube shape. There is also minimal bond between the exterior brownstone and the rubble stone backup. The concern for stability of the towers relates to the condition of the masonry between the water table and the base of the steeple roof. This section could potentially collapse while leaving the timber standing, it could also collapse and take the timber down.

Although I am not concerned with anyone questioning my engineering abilities as they relate to historic structures, I can assure you I have a history of working on historic projects. I spent my early career working for a firm that specialized in historic preservation. My work included the following as well as many other projects:

- Restoration of the Jethro Coffin House, the oldest house on Nantucket.
- Condition assessments on 13 historic lighthouses in the Chesapeake Bay for the Maryland Historic Trust
- Restoration of five historic lighthouses in the Long Island Sound
- Restoration of three lighthouses in the Delaware Bay
- Restoration of four lighthouses on the Maine coast.
- Restoration of an historic building on the grounds of the Finn's Point National Cemetery.
- Adaptive reuse of the Machine Shop at the Hagley Museum.
- Construction engineering for the stabilization of the heavy timber roof assembly at the Temple University Baptist Temple.
- The most recent restoration of the exterior façade of the U.S. Custom House in Philadelphia.
- Structural engineering for the adaptive reuse of the historic Main Post Office in Philadelphia, including preservation of the historic corridor.
- Modifications to the Free Library of Philadelphia.
- Adaptive reuse of the First National Bank Building for the Science History Institute (formerly the Chemical Heritage Foundation.)
- Renovation of Memorial Hall at the University of Delaware.
- Renovation of Cambrian Row at Bryn Mawr College.

**Mark A. Coggin, P.E., LEED AP**

Senior Principal

Thornton Tomasetti

1700 Market Street, Suite 1750

Philadelphia, PA 19103

T +1.267.238.4000

D +1.267.238.4004 M +1.302.897.6235

[MCoggin@ThorntonTomasetti.com](mailto:MCoggin@ThorntonTomasetti.com)

[www.ThorntonTomasetti.com](http://www.ThorntonTomasetti.com)

**RE: St. Laurentius****McClure, Matthew N.** <McClure@ballardspahr.com>

Tue 7/7/2020 3:17 PM

**To:** Paul Steinke <psteinke@preservationalliance.com>; Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>; Laura Dipasquale <Laura.Dipasquale@Phila.gov>; Leonard Reuter <Leonard.Reuter@Phila.gov>**Cc:** Beverly, Devon <BeverlyD@ballardspahr.com>; Humberto Fernandini <humbertofernandini@yahoo.com>; Patrick Grossi <patrick@preservationalliance.com>

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Mr. Steinke:

Mark Coggin and Jan Vacca were hired by our client for their expert opinions without any suggestion as to what the answer is. As such, their opinion is independent. Mr. Coggin and Ms. Vacca are professionals.

Again, if you have questions for Mr. Coggin or Ms. Vacca, please let us know. We will get the questions answered.

All the best,

Matt

**Matthew N. McClure**

Ballard Spahr LLP

1735 Market Street, 51st FloorPhiladelphia, PA 19103-7599Direct 215.864.8771Fax 215.864.8999mcclure@ballardspahr.comwww.ballardspahr.com

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**From:** Paul Steinke <psteinke@preservationalliance.com>**Sent:** Tuesday, July 7, 2020 2:51 PM**To:** McClure, Matthew N. (Phila) <McClure@ballardspahr.com>; Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>; Laura Dipasquale <Laura.Dipasquale@Phila.gov>; leonard.reuter@phila.gov**Cc:** Beverly, Devon (Phila) <BeverlyD@ballardspahr.com>; Humberto Fernandini <humbertofernandini@yahoo.com>; Patrick Grossi <patrick@preservationalliance.com>**Subject:** RE: St. Laurentius**⚠ EXTERNAL**

Dr. Farnham, Ms. Dipasquale and Attorney Reuter:

Our letter was intended for the Historical Commission. We expected it would be shared with the relevant parties as they saw fit.

I contacted Mr. Mark Coggin of Thornton Tomasetti today as part of a fact-finding effort. My understanding is that Mr. Coggin is an independent engineer contracted in response to a request by L&I. I'm not sure why Mr. McClure would infer that there's anything wrong with trying to understand the facts ahead of the Historical Commission meeting on Friday that could determine the fate of a property listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic

Places. I now have a better understanding of what "independent" may mean in this context, and for that I am grateful.

Please include my response in the record as well.

Thank you.

Paul Steinke  
Executive Director  
Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia  
1608 Walnut Street, Suite 1702  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
(215) 546-1146 ext. 1

**Save the Date for the 2020 Preservation Achievement Awards**



<http://www.preservationalliance.com/2020-preservation-awards/>

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**From:** McClure, Matthew N. <[McClure@ballardspahr.com](mailto:McClure@ballardspahr.com)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 7, 2020 1:50 PM

**To:** Jon Farnham <[Jon.Farnham@phila.gov](mailto:Jon.Farnham@phila.gov)>; Laura Dipasquale <[Laura.Dipasquale@Phila.gov](mailto:Laura.Dipasquale@Phila.gov)>;  
[leonard.reuter@phila.gov](mailto:leonard.reuter@phila.gov)

**Cc:** Paul Steinke <[psteinke@preservationalliance.com](mailto:psteinke@preservationalliance.com)>; Beverly, Devon <[BeverlyD@ballardspahr.com](mailto:BeverlyD@ballardspahr.com)>; Humberto Fernandini <[humbertofernandini@yahoo.com](mailto:humbertofernandini@yahoo.com)>

**Subject:** St. Laurentius

Dr. Farnham, Ms. Dipasquale and Attorney Reuter:

We just received (through a third party) the attached letter from the Preservation Alliance dated yesterday. In the letter, Mr. Steinke raises questions that we will address at the Friday, July 10 meeting.

Notwithstanding the fact that I reached out to Mr. Steinke (copied here) yesterday and today about the application and that I have gotten him very timely responses to his questions from our calls, he did not see fit to send us a copy of this letter. Obviously, if he wants these questions answered on Friday (instead of a simple filibuster), it would be helpful for him to actually send us the questions. As such, please send us copies of all such letters that you receive.

Moreover, Mr. Steinke has been calling at least one of our experts. As I told him, if he would like information, we will gladly share it. All he has to do is contact me. Please include this email in the record.

All the best,

Matt

## St. Laurentius Church, 1600-1606 Berks Street

Steven Peitzman <peitzmansj@gmail.com>

Thu 7/9/2020 11:51 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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9 July 2020

To the members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission

I write concerning the matter of St. Laurentius Church on Berks Street. The story is a complex one involving the shrinkage of congregations, failure or inability of the Philadelphia Catholic Diocese to properly maintain its inactive properties, and delay in possible re-use by well-intended but ultimately counterproductive former congregants.

The case may seem hopeless, but I urge the commissioners to deny the request to demolish at this time. The Harman Group report refers to likely collapse of towers on a *scale of years*. The Thornton Tomasetti report does allow that "Possibly, through thoughtful engineering, a method of rebuilding the masonry of the towers could be determined." The current owner or owners should, through L & I, be requested to make repairs (as with any Philadelphia property owner in this situation), and pursue their re-use plans. They would have the option to bring a hardship claim to the Commission, following the established procedure.

In general, I believe the notion of demolition "in the public interest," though allowed in the ordinance, should be appealed to in only the most extraordinary circumstances, where indeed large numbers of persons would clearly benefit ("the public interest"). It should be assumed that it is in the public interest to preserve historic and architecturally meritorious buildings; if this were not the case, we would not have an historical commission, ordinances, register, etc.

Respectfully,

Steven J. Peitzman, MD

STEVEN J. PEITZMAN, MD  
2911 Wood Pipe Lane Apt D  
PHILADELPHIA PA 19129

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

## Fw: St Laurentius church - 1600-06 Berks St.

P

preservation  
Thu 7/9/2020 12:42 PM  
To: preservation

    

**From:** Michael O'Reilly <mikefilmguy@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, July 6, 2020 6:41 AM  
**To:** Darrell Clarke <Darrell.Clarke@phila.gov>; Mark Squilla <Mark.Squilla@Phila.gov>; Jeffery Young <Jeffery.Young@Phila.gov>; Venise Whitaker <Venise.Whitaker@Phila.gov>; Marie Beren <Marie.Beren@phila.gov>; Sean Mcmonagle <Sean.Mcmonagle@phila.gov>  
**Subject:** St Laurentius church - 1600-06 Berks St.

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Respected Legislators and staff

I can see the spires of St. Laurentius Church from my backyard - I do not want that view to go away.

Currently, the process for the consideration to demolish "seems" to have been sped up, announcing over a holiday weekend that a hearing has been established in less than a week (!) to determine whether the church can be demolished.

Please SLOW DOWN this process. A week's notice over a holiday weekend is not an appropriate amount of time for the consideration of this great and historic building. If the church IS ultimately demolished, I'd like it to be done fairly.

Thank you

Michael O'Reilly  
1553 E. Montgomery ave  
Phila PA 19125



## St Laurentius Church

PATRICIA KRUSE <pattikruse@msn.com>

Wed 7/8/2020 5:14 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Please do Not destroy another beautiful Church. It is the very character of our city. This is my lifelong parish. The bells ringing told us it was time for school , church or curfew. I cannot image St Laurentius Majestic spires not there leading us home to Fishtown. Please consider saving this historic Church for future generations.

Sincerely and Respectfully

Patricia Kruse

From me to you 😊

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

## Fw: St. Laurentius Church

P

preservation  
Thu 7/9/2020 9:52 AM  
To: preservation

    

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**From:** jnt2710@aol.com <jnt2710@aol.com>  
**Sent:** Saturday, July 4, 2020 8:23 AM  
**To:** Venise Whitaker <Venise.Whitaker@Phila.gov>  
**Subject:** St. Laurentius Church

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Please stop the demolition of St. Laurentius historical church. It is a precious landmark in our community. The developers need to stop making money on our community and disregarding the historical landmarks. Demolition would be devastating for our community. Please help our community save this beloved landmark. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this matter.

## Vote no

Denise Dennis <patchworksdrd@icloud.com>

Wed 7/8/2020 9:12 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Pleas vote no to developers who want to tear die this historic church!! Not only do developers destroy the surrounding neighborhoods what the put up devalues the entire community.

Sent from my iPhone

## Please Allow the Demolition of the St Laurentius Church Building

Dan Roth <dan@danroth.net>

Wed 7/8/2020 3:40 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Dear Members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission,

The Saint Laurentius Church Building is a wonderful piece of architecture. It is a beautiful building. More importantly, it is both of great historical importance to our city and an important repository of memories of some of the most important moments in Fishtown's collective memory and in the individual memories of our residents.

I wish this building had been preserved, and I sincerely believe it could have been. Unfortunately, it is clear that it is now long past that time. While it remains a beautiful building and an important part of our history, it has also become a dangerous crumbling structure threatening the safety of our residents, especially our children.

Therefore, as a concerned Fishtown resident, I ask that you please vote to allow it's demolition.

Sincerely,  
Daniel P. Roth

## St. Laurentius and the July 10, 2020 Historical Commision meeting

Drew Miller <drewwerdme@gmail.com>

Wed 7/8/2020 11:55 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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hi,

My name is Andrew Miller and I am a resident and stakeholder in the Fishtown neighborhood within Philadelphia. I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposal for the demolition of St. Laurentius (1600-1606 E Berks St) that the Philadelphia Historical Commission is considering in the July 10 meeting later this week.

I believe the commission must vote NO on the demolition proposal put before them in this matter.

Judging by the engineer reports included in the proposal, the two towers of St. Laurentius may need to be demolished, but that does not mean that the Historical Commission should abandon the entire building. St. Laurentius is an important historical and cultural landmark in the Fishtown neighborhood. Furthermore, I see nothing in the engineer reports that would prevent the current owner from reusing the building after the towers are removed. This was his stated plan when purchasing the property in January 2020.

When purchasing this property in January, the current owner should have been aware of his responsibilities and that significant maintenance would be expected to protect the building and the public in the process towards reusing the building. There are no specifics given in the proposal towards making a case for financial hardship. This is likely due to the fact that many, if not all, of these expenses were expected when the property was purchased. Only the current owner and his lawyer make the case for hardship warranting the demolition of the entire structure. The financial picture painted in the engineer reports describes the cost to restore the towers, but provides no details on the option of removing the towers while reusing the building.

The current owner and his lawyer state that stabilizing the building while demolishing the towers will cause an unsafe delay in the process, but they also propose saving the art and other culturally significant pieces within the building. Both of these processes will take time and will likely be able to be executed simultaneously. The benefit of doing both of these things is that the art, other culturally significant pieces, and the building can all be saved from becoming trash.

Additionally, the Historical Commission must vote NO on this demolition proposal because the procedure has not allowed for the necessary review process that is in place precisely to ensure that the Historical Commission has sufficient and balanced information to decide the correct, educated decision regarding a proposal and its alternatives.

I hope that the Historical Commission will appropriately consider the voices of my neighbors and I in addition to seeking out all the necessary information to render their decision on July 10, 2020 in the public's interest.

Thank you for your time.

Andrew Miller  
1405 E. Columbia Ave

## Preserving St. Laurentius

Marilyn Pitt <marilyn.pitt@americanreading.com>

Mon 7/6/2020 9:13 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Philadelphia Historical Commission,

We were upset to learn that the Historical Commission is supporting the demolition of St. Laurentius Church. Additionally, that the demolition is being fast tracked, giving neighbors only a week to respond.

The community has been waiting for a response from the Commission for over a year, and then the determination is made suddenly, precluding (intentionally?) any thoughtful or organized reaction from the neighbors. The possibility of losing the beauty of the façade and the lovely church spires from the neighborhood seems incredibly sad. At a time when the Fishtown area is struggling with the blight of new, badly designed housing, destroying a building that has history and grace seems particularly hurtful to the community.

We've assumed that the mission of the Historical Commission is to protect uplifting pieces of Philadelphia history and architecture such as St. Laurentius Church. Please don't be another government bureaucracy listening to the voices of well-connected developers over the pleas of neighbors who love this building.

Sincerely,

Norman and Marilyn Pitt  
1239 Shackamaxon Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19125

**Fwd: St. Laurentius**

A.J. Thomson <ajthomson7@gmail.com>

Mon 7/6/2020 4:49 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>; Darrell Clarke <Darrell.Clarke@phila.gov>; Mark Squilla <Mark.Squilla@Phila.gov>

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Preservation staff,

Please review the below email to Mr. Farnham about your "emergency" hearing scheduled for Friday.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **A.J. Thomson** <[ajthomson7@gmail.com](mailto:ajthomson7@gmail.com)>

Date: Mon, Jul 6, 2020 at 4:46 PM

Subject: Re: St. Laurentius

To: Jon Farnham <[Jon.Farnham@phila.gov](mailto:Jon.Farnham@phila.gov)>, Mark Squilla <[Mark.Squilla@phila.gov](mailto:Mark.Squilla@phila.gov)>, Darrell Clarke <[darrell.clarke@phila.gov](mailto:darrell.clarke@phila.gov)>

Mr. Farnham,

As the attorney for the original designee, I shall participate in this emergency hearing requesting that St. Laurentius be demolished. This owner took the building knowing full well its condition. For him to say its a hardship now and for you to schedule this hearing within a week over July 4th weekend is something that I expect from the Trump administration, not the entity tasked with preserving historic buildings that it designated free from such capricious demolish. Our parish paid a considerable amount of money to bring the towers up to code. Please provide me with the necessary credentials to attend this hearing.

A.J. Thomson  
215-287-3492

On Wed, Oct 18, 2017 at 1:08 PM Jon Farnham <[Jon.Farnham@phila.gov](mailto:Jon.Farnham@phila.gov)> wrote:

AJ:

I am free most of this afternoon, but tied up every minute of the day tomorrow. Let me know if you are going to call this afternoon and I'll be sure to be in my office. My direct line is 215-832-2125.

Jon

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

## 1606 E. Berks

Evelyn Torres <torres@lasalle.edu>

Mon 7/6/2020 2:46 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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I oppose the demolition of 1606 E. Berks.

That's such a historical site.

Thank you,

**Evelyn Torres, '12**

Assistant Director of Prospect Research

La Salle University | University Advancement

**O: 215-991-3548 | C: 267-255-5568 | F: 215-951-1542**



## Save St Laurentius

Mary Galgon <itsmarygalgon@gmail.com>

Sun 7/5/2020 12:26 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Philadelphia Historical Commission,

I was dismayed to learn that over the holiday weekend, your organization promoted demolition of the beautiful St Laurentius church.... with a week to respond.

The public have garnered support and went through all legal actions, waiting 1.5 years for a response, to be smacked with a sneak attack.

No violations on the structure, a community trying to save an uplifting piece of history.

So much for playing fair.

With all that is going on in the world today, can we, at least, admit that greed is not always the answer.

When some things are gone, they will never be again.

You have to admit that those amazing spires are unique and a part of our Philadelphia history.

Not to mention what it means to the many local families who counted St Laurentius as part of their home, life, and security.

Just gazing at the church, even discounting the religious significance, might change how you feel about a day gone bad.

Jon, please open your mind, ears, and heart to what you are trying to make happen and think better of it.

It is not too late.

Sincerely,

Mary Galgon

945 N American St

19123

Philly native. Be kind.

## Demolition notice 1600-06 E Berks St

maggie0824@verizon.net <maggie0824@verizon.net>

Sun 7/5/2020 2:32 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Regarding the proposed demolition for the above stated address will the neighbors in the area immediately surrounding this building be relocated while demolition is ongoing and at whose expense will we be relocated?

Also for those of us with respiratory issues how will air quality be monitored?

Hopefully this demolition will not be a quality of life issue for my neighbors as well as me!!!

Thank you for taking the time to address my concerns!!!

MargaretAnn Ramsey

Sent from AOL Mobile Mail

Get the new AOL app: [mail.mobile.aol.com](mailto:mail.mobile.aol.com)