

Fwd: Stop the St. Laurentius Church demolition

preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Tue 7/21/2020 3:03 PM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: Vincent Cordisco <vincecordisco@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 10:55 AM

To: preservation

Subject: Stop the St. Laurentius Church demolition

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We all knew this day would come because of stubborn Fishtown residents but we can't let it doom a majestic piece of Philadelphia architecture. In west Philly we have a church that will become a rock climbing gym. In Baltimore they have an old church that has become a brewery and in Spain they have a church that has become a skatepark. Why is Philly any different? WE MUST DO BETTER TO STOP THIS.

Thank you,
Vincent Cordisco

brewery: [https://www.baltimoresun.com/resizer/mRzi26RWptv1O74Je9K-xofWkaQ=/fit-in/800x533/smart/filters:fill\(black\)/arc-anglerfish-arc2-prod-tronc.s3.amazonaws.com/public/VCMIJ2NFLBGAVNECQWS3K5XRZA.jpg](https://www.baltimoresun.com/resizer/mRzi26RWptv1O74Je9K-xofWkaQ=/fit-in/800x533/smart/filters:fill(black)/arc-anglerfish-arc2-prod-tronc.s3.amazonaws.com/public/VCMIJ2NFLBGAVNECQWS3K5XRZA.jpg)

skatepark church: <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/skatechurch-6.jpg>

Fwd: St. Laurentius Demolition Permit

preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Tue 7/21/2020 3:02 PM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: Ann de Forest <deforestann@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 11:12 AM

To: preservation

Subject: St. Laurentius Demolition Permit

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I am writing to comment on agenda item for today's meeting: should PHC grant applicant a demolition permit for a historically designated and protected structure, St. Laurentius Church?

My answer is a resounding NO. The property owner has not acted in good faith to maintain and secure the property, and has furthermore, deceived the public about their intentions.

The public deserves due process of at least 30 days before any demolition permit is granted.

This building is a significant historic landmark in Fishtown. It is not just a beautiful and unique (read: irreplaceable) piece of architecture, but a place that holds memories and meaning for several generations of residents.

The decision to demolish such an important, beautiful, and meaningful structure can be made only after much deliberation. Many experts believe that the church not only can be saved, but can be repurposed to continue to be an important resource in the neighborhood. If it's gone, it will be gone forever.

I want to add, on a personal note, that I lived abroad all of last year, in northern Italy, Rome, and Cambridge, England. When I told people there about churches that had been demolished in Philadelphia they were horrified. "Aren't there laws to protect those buildings? That's your heritage?" The role of the Historic Commission is to be a protector. The number of times you have failed in this duty in the years I've lived in Philadelphia is distressing. We are losing our heritage and our history. Every town and city in Europe understands the value investing in maintaining their historic infrastructure, in cultivating a culture through layers of memory and meaning.

Please do your job and deny this demolition permit.

Thank you,
Ann de Forest

Fwd: 2501-61 North 15th Street Request for Continuance

preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Fri 7/10/2020 7:05 AM

To: Kim Chantry <Kim.Chantry@Phila.gov>; Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: Katherine Dowdell <kdowdell@farragutstreet.com>
Sent: Thursday, July 9, 2020 8:58 PM
To: preservation
Subject: 2501-61 North 15th Street Request for Continuance

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Re: 2501-61 North 15th Street

To the Historical Commission:

I am writing to support the nomination of 2501 North 15th Street to the Philadelphia Register, and to ask that you deny the applicant's request for a continuance to your October 2020 meeting. As you may (or may not) know, the current owner has presented a development proposal to the Civic Design Review Committee which includes demolition of these buildings and construction of a five-story storage building and large parking lot on the site. The project was presented at the Civic Design Review Committee meeting on June 9, 2020. They are currently on the agenda to return to the CDR on July 14, 2020.

This building designation got caught in the Covid shutdown. The nomination for these buildings was submitted in September 2019; the Historical Commission's Designation Committee heard the nomination in January 2020, and the full Commission was to consider and vote on the nomination at their March 2020 meeting, which was cancelled. This nomination is now scheduled to be heard at this week's meeting on Friday July 10, 2020. The Applicant is asking you to continue consideration of this matter until your October meeting.

It would appear that the Applicant's motivation in asking for a continuance is to allow them time to further develop this project; possibly to obtain zoning approval; anything to advance the idea that this development proposal precedes the consideration of adding this

building to the Register. In fact, any owner doing reasonable due diligence would have known by December 2019 that this building had been nominated, and would have known by January 2020 that the Designation Committee recommended adding this building to the Register. So any work on a development proposal after January was ostensibly with full knowledge of the protections afforded by historic designation. Planning to demolish a building so protected seems unwise.

Should the Commission determine that granting the continuance request is best at this time, I ask that you remind the Applicant and the development team in the strongest terms that, at the moment at least, and hopefully for the future, these buildings are protected historic resources, and they should be treated as such. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Dowdell

St. Laurentius Church, 1600-1606 East Berks Street

Katherine Dowdell <kdowdell@farragutstreet.com>

Thu 7/9/2020 8:59 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Cc: Paul Steinke <psteinke@preservationalliance.com>; Patrick Grossi <patrick@preservationalliance.com>; Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

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To the Historical Commission:

Saint Laurentius is a landmark building that should be saved. The current condition of the towers is alarming. It is vital that some system be put in place immediately which will stabilize the towers, and simultaneously protect the public. This is urgent. However, there is no demonstrated need to demolish the entire church; nor is there a demonstrated need to demolish the towers. I urge you to require the Owner to protect this building by stabilizing the towers, safeguarding the public, and then taking the time needed to assess the best way to move forward to save Saint Laurentius.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Dowdell

Fwd: St. Laurentius Church - Proposed Demolition

preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Tue 7/21/2020 3:04 PM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: Susan Feenan <sfeenan@msn.com>
Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 10:28 AM
To: preservation
Subject: St. Laurentius Church - Proposed Demolition

External Email Notice. This email comes from outside of City government. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender.

I am writing with regards to the proposed demolition of the St. Laurentius Church Building at 1600 E. Berks Street.

Please strive in earnest to fulfill the mission of the Philadelphia Historic Commission to ***“protect the City’s historic resources”***.

I am a resident of Fishtown and thoroughly opposed to the destruction of the entire church.

I understand the towers have become *‘irreversibly unstable’* and that the spires should be removed, but PLEASE do not permit the destruction of the entire building – an *‘irreversible’* action that would not only destroy a rare and beautiful building – *the likes of which could never be replicated*, but leave a gaping hole in the built fabric (and hearts) of our neighborhood.

This would be one of the worst examples of a beautiful Philadelphia 'baby' being thrown out with the bathwater.

There are many precedents of church spires being removed, while leaving the tower bases (and the church proper) in place. This work can and should be done. It is not a matter of “extraordinary cost (or practicality)” it is a failure of the imagination.

Sadly, the residents of Fishtown, do not have the resources to save our own treasure, we are at the mercy of those with money (*outside developers who have no meaningful skin in the neighborhood game*) and the political will of elected officials (*who understandably have other things to worry about*). But we are tired of having our beautiful built treasures irrevocably destroyed to make way for parking lots or (*sorry for*

the personal opinion – but character-less) new residential construction. From an architectural, historical and anthropological perspective, it borders on criminal.

In the midst of this hitherto inconceivable year of the coronavirus pandemic, righteous (and long overdue) civil unrest, and a completely bananas political climate – maybe saving a building is not relevant or even important. However, it does present a wonderful opportunity to get something right. One thing. A chance to push back against what's 'easy' and give this building a chance for a truly spectacular second act for this building.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Feenan
East Montgomery Ave.
Philadelphia, PA

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

FRANK T. BRZOZOWSKI

2357 E. Dauphin Street
Philadelphia, PA 19125
fbrzozow@gmail.com
215-906-3773 (cell)
215-425-7672 (home)

RE:

ADDRESS: 1600-06 E BERKS ST

Proposal: Demolish building owing to necessity in the public interest

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: 1600 Berks LLC

Applicant: Matt McClure, Esq., Ballard Spahr

History: 1885-90, St. Laurentius Church, Edwin Forest Durang, architect

Individual Designation: 7/10/2015

District Designation: None

Staff Contact: Jon Farnham

To: Philadelphia Historical Commission

This is opposition to the demolition of St Laurentius Church, a historical landmark in Fishtown. The testimony of Frank T Brzozowski and written submissions from previous hearings are to be incorporated herein.

I was the first president of New Kensington Community Development Corporation (NKCDC) which renovated many properties in the area. Our first board evolved from the New Kensington NAC and we started from 6 members. I tried to get them to make a business incubator, NKCDC enterprise center, at Hagert and Coral Streets. It became a residential arts building.

NKCDC wanted to make 60 artist lofts at Gaul and York Street that I opposed. It was defeated; now the four-story factory has commercial offices like a business incubator at 2424 E York Street.

The Faithful Laurentians was supposed to obtain non-profit IRS 501(c)(3) status; papers were not duly filed; it could have been St Laurentius Enterprise Center. I wanted to get a long term loan, fix the St Laurentius steeples, get insurance, business plan, and turn the area into rental offices; some could be used as classrooms.

As an unincorporated association, we are limited with what we could have done. I knew from the beginning that the developers really wanted to let the church deteriorate. Someone climbed on the scaffolds and pried stones off the wall, one rectangular piece was about 500 pounds. In December 2018 I saw a thin athletic man who was in the enclosure jump the wire fence and run East on Berks Street. The developer does not want to maintain the integrity of the historical church.

The archdioceses (AOP) discriminated against the Polish parishioners who wanted to obtain the deed. The self-insured AOP did not maintain property insurance to fix the leaks. The archdioceses also saw that other religions could not obtain the church. The previous archbishop made a deal with John Wisniewski, from the Polish Home on Academy Road, who has not lived in the area for over 40 years to remove some artifacts. (Wisniewski's used to live on Fletcher Street when he attended St Laurentius).

The Holy Name parish sold St Laurentius convent and garage but did not use these proceeds to repair the steeples. Holy Name is cannibalizing all assets that they can liquidate. As a contrast St Valentine Polish National Catholic Church parish, 2330 Margaret St., insures its church, rectory, and cemetery with property insurance.

The developer's request for demolition must be denied.

Historical Commission Meeting , July 10

Regina Gorzkowska <proarterg@yahoo.com>

Fri 7/10/2020 10:59 AM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>; Laura Spina <Laura.Spina@phila.gov>

Cc: John Wisniewski <jrw153@comcast.net>; Anthony P. Krzywicki <akrzywicki@mac.com>; Edward A. Jajko <ejajko@gmail.com>; Frank Brzozowski <frankbrzozow@gmail.com>; ANTHONY WASKIE <awaski01@gmail.com>; ParksandRecreation <parksandrecreation@phila.gov>; Ana Irizarry <Ana.Irizarry@phila.gov>; Venise Whitaker <vwwhit16@gmail.com>

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To Mr. Jonathan Farnham
Philadelphia Historical Commissioner
and his team:

Your announcement reached me late and I hurry up to meet your online deadline (July 10) to report, with due respect and apologies, new insights and developments concerning St. Laurentius.

1. A qualified expert opinion on St. Laurentius is available. I am e-mailing Professor Jacek Golebiowski, Catholic Univ. of Lublin, and asking him to approach you directly and e-mail his expert opinion concerning the architectural and painterly value of the church under consideration. His documentary and research team visited the church in May 2019 and they were barred by the pandemic from returning during this summer. However, they processed their research and I assume they are ready to share with the Commission their expert opinion supported by photographic documentation to be published in "Catalogue of the 'Polish Cathedral' type Immigrant Churches in America, 1880-1920." The church building period ended roughly with the end the World War One, and the 2nd wave of building in the period of prosperity after the 2nd World War, it concentrated on enlarging or building 2nd churches for their new big congregations. Professor Golebiowski's visit was noticed in Philadelphia. Mayor Kenney and the Philadelphia City Council acknowledged their work with a special letter of appreciation (in possession of the City Representative's Office, Sheila Hess).

2. The First World War and St. Laurentius.

This was my thirty years' topic: discovering Polish Philadelphia in my biweekly column in the Polish Daily News and in separate multi-page sections highlighting the annual Pulaski Day Parades. The Pulaski Day and the parade were initiated by President Hoover in 1929 as a bilateral Polish and American brotherhood-at-arms parade in Philadelphia and other cities with large Polish populations. It originally followed the route from Logan Circle to Independence Hall before moving to the parade grounds on BF Parkway. As Pro Arte Associates I was involved with promoting and protecting two Polish oil paintings brought in 1893 to the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in an effort to prove cultural unity of the divided nation partitioned among its three neighbors. The first Polish newspaper in Philadelphia was entitled "Jednosc" (Unity). Modern artists were presented there next to a dozen of famous large in scale paintings by Matejko, depicting key points in the history of the Republic of Two Nations, a proto European Union combining the three principal nations within one state organism: Poles, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians, and other minorities professing a number of creeds. The Polish art exhibited in Chicago marked the new trend: an organized effort

to promote the nation's drive towards Independence. Two of those paintings, Styka and Piechowski, were purchased for the new Il Gesu parish at a post-exhibition auction in Philadelphia and they are kept since that time in one of the historically most prominent churches in Philadelphia. Incidentally, Il Gesu is about to get a new lease on life being absorbed into the newly created Jesuit Province - the East Province. Philadelphia got two excellent churches by Edwin Forrest Durang in the area verging on the Parkway (dedicated to the new architectural principle) plus a Synagogue on Green Street called Jewish Rittenhouse Square (competing with WASP, Philadelphia Jews were banned from Rittenhouse Sq.). Edwin Forrest Durang built St. Laurentius, Fishtown, at the same time as the Port Richmond Nativity of BVM to have it redecorated for the jubilee by an Italian immigrant artist Lorenzo Scattaglia, with two original paintings replicated within Durang's Gothic arches by his friend and coworker, an Italian immigrant artist. Professor Golebiowski's experts bring recognition to the underestimated Scattaglia. Both works of art, the original kept in Il Gesu and its copy by Scattaglia in St. Laurentius refer to the nation's drive for Independence. A three-estate representation of Polish people gather around their Queen Mary in prayer for Independence. The artist - Jan Styka - was Matejko's favorite student in Krakow. When I presented the paintings to the visiting Krakow Deputy Mayor, she wrote me that she was shocked to discover the quintessential Krakow in Philadelphia. Let me add it is the "double Krakow", the painting in Philadelphia's Center City is doubled in Fishtown, the immigrant area, where it proved a signal an actual call -to-arms poster.

To sum it up, Richard Juliani gave us a great story "Philadelphia's Italians on the Battlefield and Home Front" (Temple Univ. Press, 2020). I am still toiling on my story how Philadelphia, the city of Independence, inspired Poles, Lithuanians and Ukrainians to go back and win their country. I think I will ask Inga Saffron to help me convince you of Philadelphia's contribution to realising Poland's dream of Independence. It is hard to understand how Poles, Lithuanians, and Italians living in the same Old Kensington neighborhood on the Delaware River decided they needed to go back to reform and modernise Old Europe. In our Port Richmond Immigrant Village we still can observe those nationalities marked by their nationality churches. We can still try and rediscover the color and flavor of those folks in Philadelphia's neighborhoods. I will try to solicit the Inquirer columnist Inga Saffron's help to convince you as to "using public history to revitalize the Inner City" to borrow the phrase from Andrew Hurley's new book "Beyond Preservation" in the Temple University series on Urban Life, Landscape and Policy. A North Philadelphia's poet used the same method to observe the spirit of his native place on the steps of row houses in his recent poetry collection.

If St. Laurentius building survives, I would ask you to help me negotiate with the new owner to get a nook or a corner to fund there St. Laurentius World War One Chapel/Museum/Archive.

3. St. Laurentius and Philadelphia's Waterfront.

This is my third argument for preserving St. Laurentius. We need to keep it. Philadelphia is building "a new vibrant destination location for recreational, cultural and commercial activities for the residents and visitors," the new neighborhood on the Delaware on the other side of I-95 (see Master Plan for the Central Delaware). It started with working on its riveredge parks and trails. Organized as Friends of Pulaski Park we helped the city to recover its first pier park built in 1971 and then lost and recovered with our working support backing in the city investment of the new century. I relocate from the Center City Museum Tower to Port Richmond to be

closer to my local organizations to lobby for the Port Richmond Immigrant Village incorporate in the RiverWards District Development Plan 2015-2025. This is our voice to keep the landmark church as a historic monument to the era of the Great War. Please take into consideration this voice during today's deliberations,

Sincerely yours,

Regina Gorzkowski-Rossi

Pro Arte Associates in Philadelphia

3349 E. Thompson Street (old smithy)

Philadelphia, PA 19134

proarterg@yahoo.com

Cell: 267 535 1691

R .G.-R

Fwd: comment on St. Laurentius

preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Tue 7/21/2020 3:02 PM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: Michael Greenle <michael.greenle@gmail.com>**Sent:** Friday, July 10, 2020 12:33 PM**To:** preservation**Subject:** comment on St. Laurentius

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Dear Philadelphia Historic Commission, this is a very disappointing proposal to demolish because the owner purchased the property only a half a year ago knowing its historic designation and associated requirements to stabilize it. Costs to stabilize should not be a relevant issue considering this foreknowledge. It sends a terrible signal to developers that the revolving door is open to purchase historic buildings, allow them to continue to deteriorate, and then be rewarded with a by right development on a site that was rezoned to support reuse. Please require the owner to seek all possible remedies, including removal of the steeples, before demolition will be considered. This will send a strong signal that the Commission will provide sufficient scrutiny that historic buildings be preserved before demolition can be considered. Thank you for your work,

Michael Greenle
1213 Marlborough St.
Philadelphia, PA 19125

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Michael Greenle
michael.greenle@gmail.com
202-997-1827

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

Fwd: St Laurentius Church demolition permit

preservation
Fri 7/10/2020 8:23 AM
To: Jon Farnham

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: howardbhaas@aol.com <howardbhaas@aol.com>
Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 7:26:50 AM
To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>
Cc: wunsch@design.upenn.edu <wunsch@design.upenn.edu>; pr.steinke@gmail.com <pr.steinke@gmail.com>; isaffron@phillynews.com <isaffron@phillynews.com>
Subject: St Laurentius Church demolition permit

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Dear Historical Commission:

As a Philadelphia citizen, I object to the demolition permit for St Laurentius Church. I read in the demolition application, that there are possibilities that one or more towers of the church might not survive for 3 years or 10 years. As a lawyer, I'd be ashamed to assert that demolition is needed now because sometime far in the future, a tower might fall down! There needs to be an independent consideration of what repairs might be needed for this beautiful, very historic church that the community loves very much. Please do not grant the demolition permit.

Howard B. Haas
Philadelphia
www.HowardBHaas.com
1420 Locust Street, # 12 E
Philadelphia, PA 19102
Direct 215-546-8946

Fwd: St. Laurentius - Vote NO to Demolition

preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Fri 7/10/2020 8:23 AM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: Jeanne's Gmail <jeannemurphycurtis@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 4:00:32 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Subject: St. Laurentius - Vote NO to Demolition

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Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to demand a NO vote to the demolition request made by 1600 Berks, LLC in regards to St. Laurentius Church. I was part of the original preservation committee who lobbied for the designation of the exterior as well as the interior.

My research on St. Laurentius continued following Mr. Wisniewski's withdrawal of the application for the designation of the interior. That research garnered the attention of a scholar at Stanford University, who happened to be a former student and parishioner of St. Laurentius. At his urging and through his sponsorship, I submitted an abstract of my work to PIASA (Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America). That submission resulted in an invitation by PIASA to present my work on St. Laurentius in front of their membership at their annual conference at Columbia University.

Due to the contentious nature of efforts to save St. Laurentius and personal attacks on my character, my work never saw the light of day in Philadelphia.

St. Laurentius represents a significant and irreplaceable piece of architectural history, not only to Fishtown and Philadelphia, but to the history of Polish Americans across the nation. As one of the founding Polish Catholic parishes in the US, and one that was uniquely designed and crafted in the Polish Cathedral style by 19th century Polish immigrants for a newly thriving Polish community in Philadelphia, St. Laurentius paints a very distinct narrative, one that is uniquely reflective of the specific regions of Poland from which the original founding families hailed. Their narrative had the additional twist of being interpreted by an American architect, the esteemed Edwin Forrest Durang, whose deep family ties to American theater influenced how he staged the interior to impart a dramatic and regal sense of grandeur - a reflection of the fervor of the faithful who commissioned him to build it.

St. Laurentius was designed around a central theme - the hope and promise that comes with the dawn of a new day with the added element of having one eye ever on the homeland and preserving that important history (hence the name change from Holy Cross to St. Laurentius, the archivist). How perfectly fitting for the community of immigrants who built it. This duality of theme is perfectly intertwined in elements throughout the church, its architecture, statuary, paintings, paint palette all reinforce this narrative. And each element along with its careful placement reinforces this central theme. Layers upon layers of significance can be found in St. Laurentius' architectural

forms and art as this church leaves no surface untouched. St. Laurentius is an architectural historian's dream and my interest in the story of St. Laurentius is not solitary. Scholars from Catholic University and Notre Dame who study sacred architecture have St. Laurentius on their radar too.

The proceedings today are particularly troublesome because at a time when we are just beginning to appreciate and understand the depth of St. Laurentius' meaning and symbolism from a critical architectural standpoint, its demise suddenly seems imminent. How can this be happening in a UNESCO World Heritage city? It is disgraceful. At the very least, St. Laurentius needs to be properly surveyed inside and out so that a complete historical record can be made before any additional dismantling takes place. To waste this opportunity would be a gross disservice to our history, not to mention all those who fought so ardently to save this cherished building for years on end. And while that process of properly archiving this historically significant place is under way, perhaps parties can start to investigate options for its stabilization and restoration instead of acting on reports that call for its immediate demolition without even attempting to detail any potential solutions? We are a UNESCO World Heritage City after all.

Respectfully yours,
Jeanne Curtis
Preservationist

Sent from my iPhone

St. Laurentius

Patricia Kinsman <patriciaann@gmail.com>

Thu 7/9/2020 6:07 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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I am writing in support of the preservation of St. Laurentius Church.

I moved to the Fishtown neighborhood with my 5-year-old son in 2009. At first, I didn't really know many people in the neighborhood. When it was time for my son to go to kindergarten, I enrolled him at St. Laurentius School and joined St. Laurentius parish. I always tell people that this was the first time I felt welcomed in the neighborhood. I completely fell in love with both the church and school. There was such a sense of community with deep ties to its history that you could just feel. I loved going to church every Sunday and being in this holy, magnificent atmosphere. I felt blessed to have such beauty in my life, a retreat that I made every Sunday.

When the Archdiocese closed St. Laurentius Church as a worship site in 2014, I was called to action. I quickly headed to Berks St. to talk to my fellow parishioners to ask, "What can we do?" Right there on the street that day, we formed a coalition of people to fight to save the church. We didn't know at the time that this fight would drag out for another 6 years.

Our group held multiple fundraisers and hired a Vatican lawyer to try to overturn the decision by the archdiocese and to keep St. Laurentius open as a church. The appeal process has three stages, and we were denied at every stage, in Latin. When we lost the third time, there was nowhere else to go. Adaptive reuse was the only way to save the church from demolition. Our councilman arranged a meeting with the Archdiocese in his office where he was able to get them to agree to help us find a buyer for the church instead of demolition. We did just that, and found a developer who came up with a plan to convert St. Laurentius into apartments.

The apartment conversion required a zoning variance, which a group called the Faithful Laurentius formed to oppose. They tied this up in court for 3 years, valuable time that could have been spent restoring St. Laurentius. While legal proceedings dragged out, stones fell off the front of the building. The church still was the responsibility of Holy Name Parish. So, last winter, the parish paid over \$100,000 to stabilize the towers. In the end, the sale went through, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. St. Laurentius would finally be restored!

Last weekend, the day before the 4th of July, I had cold water thrown in my face when I read my email and learned that the current owner was moving to demolish St. Laurentius - and pushing an expedited process through on a holiday weekend. I had thought that St. Laurentius was safe - I even let my domain savestlaurentius.org expire a few months ago because I was so sure that it would be converted.

I continue to fight for St. Laurentius. It may be 6 years since I last set foot inside of the church, but it is still a part of my life. When I am coming home on the el or driving down 95, I see the green spires and know I'm home. It's the Fishtown skyline. If those towers are gone, the neighborhood will never be the same.

Patricia Kinsman
Fishtown, Philadelphia

St. Laurentius Church building

Megan G. Thomson <mgthomson13@hotmail.com>

Fri 7/10/2020 9:02 AM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Cc: Mark Squilla <Mark.Squilla@Phila.gov>; A.J. Thomson <ajthomson7@gmail.com>; Darrell Clarke <Darrell.Clarke@phila.gov>

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Good morning, Mr Farnham.

I would first like to echo some of what AJ wrote below. This owner - Humberto Fernandini - took the building knowing full well its condition. For him to say its a hardship now, after buying it several months ago and doing no work at all is wrong. He knew full well that the building needed immediate attention and he let it sit for 6+ months before the Corona Virus closed construction for 3 months. He has let it sit after construction work resumed. It is difficult to believe that he did not plan to do this based on the emergency zoning changes...

It is disappointing for you to schedule this hearing within a week of the July 4th holiday weekend.

Five years ago(!), I was part of the community that stood before you detailing the art, neighborhood, religious history and importance of Saint Laurentius church. It all remains true. It is a beautiful testament to hard work, art and culture in Fishtown.

Please remember ALL of that!

Please consider all that Oscar Beisert notes, both today and in our original designation work.

Please note that Saint Laurentius church is connected to Saint Laurentius school in its electrical, heating and systems connections.

Please note that Mr. Fernandini knew. He knows of the struggle within our community. He knew that Venise Whitaker, Jeanne Murphy (in Wisconsin), Frank Bryowski and several others brought a lawsuit to stop the original development... a lawsuit deemed frivolous but which the Catholic Church did not stop. He knew that the parish spent close to \$175,000 in repairs and in engineering reports. He knew that the community begged Council President Clarke to spot zone the church (thus allowing him to put some monstrosity in height and density on the location which absolutely was not the point) He knew. He had the funding to do the huge repairs. He chose not to do so and to put you and L&I and our community in this position.

And please know that more important than all of this, all of my emotion and passion about Saint Laurentius church are my neighbors. Please compare ALL of the engineering reports and decide what is best for the 40 or more immediate families who live in the amazingly beautiful shadow of St Laurentius. Please only save history and art and beauty knowing that people are safe. I do not believe for one second that the towers were not carefully tied into the foundation but I was not there 140 years ago and I am not an engineer. Save as much of history as you can, but PUT SAFETY FIRST.

With sadness in my heart,
Megan Gallagher Thomson

Sent from my iPhone

> On Jul 6, 2020, at 4:47 PM, A.J. Thomson <ajthomson7@gmail.com> wrote:

>

> te 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

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

Stop vote on demo for St. Laurentius Church

J jnt2710@aol.com
Fri 7/10/2020 7:30 AM
To: preservation



External Email Notice. This email comes from outside of City government. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender.

Please save our historical church of St. Laurentius. I beg that you stop this request to demolish our historical landmark. Thank you

⏪ Reply all ▾ 🗑 Delete 🚫 Junk Block ⋮

1600-06 Berks St

NP

Nancy Pontone <npontone@gmail.com>

Thu 7/9/2020 8:21 PM

To: preservation



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Philadelphia Historical Commission:

Since this is an "emergency matter" I hope you will consider my comments despite their late filing.

The Harman Group expressed 100% probability of failure of at least a portion of the Northern Towers within 10 years and 80% in three years; this isn't imminent collapse. Has L&I determined that collapse is imminent?

Thornton Tomasetti, Inc mentioned a high cost to rebuild but there is no analysis of financial hardship. Wasn't the new owner aware of the condition of the towers and wouldn't they have factored in the cost to repair/rebuild in the price they negotiated. Since the price was low, at apparently \$50,000, it seems that the cost to repair was taken into account in setting the purchase price.

What is the estimated cost to demolish? I don't see it mentioned. If this is a financial hardship case why isn't the cost to demolish being considered in weighing options. Shouldn't the Hardship Committee review this before a vote by the full Commission?

Please don't be hasty after years of deliberation concerning this church. Philadelphia needs to retain its landmark and historic structures. This church and its towers define this neighborhood and its heritage.

Thank you,
Nancy Pontone

St. Laurentius Church Demolition

George Poulin <gpoulin@stradallc.com>

Fri 7/10/2020 8:51 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

External Email Notice. This email comes from outside of City government. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender.

7.10.20

Via Email

Re: St. Laurentius Church, 1600-06 E Berks

Dear Commission,

I want to offer my concern over the emergency matter presented for 1600-06 E Berks St, the St. Laurentius Church. While I understand the need to protect the public from matters of immediate concern, I have read through the application materials submitted and do not find an argument has been made which requires demolition of the entire structure. I feel this application is being hurried through the Commission without due process. Additionally, the owner appears to have made little effort to stabilize the property in the intervening years of their initial purchase. Both the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and RePoint Philadelphia have outlined substantial concerns with the current application and noted gaps in the materials submitted.

It is therefore that I urge the Commission to consider this matter in such a manner that does not set a dangerous precedent for future listed properties.

Respectfully,
George Poulin, AIA

Public Comment on July 10 Agenda: St. Laurentius (1600-06 E BERKS)

kevin.j.brett@gmail.com <kevin.j.brett@gmail.com>

on behalf of

RePoint Philadelphia <repointphila@gmail.com>

Fri 7/10/2020 7:26 AM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>; preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

 2 attachments (611 KB)

RePoint PHC Exec Summary - St. Laurentius.pdf; RePoint Philadelphia_PHC 061020_St Laurentius_Public Comment.pdf;

External Email Notice. This email comes from outside of City government. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender.

Dr. Farnham,

Please find attached the following documents to be incorporated into the public record in advance of today's meeting:

- 1.) Executive summary
- 2.) Full public comment

These documents are being provided for your review relating to the building permit application for the demolition of the building commonly known as St. Laurentius Church at 1600-06 E Berks St.

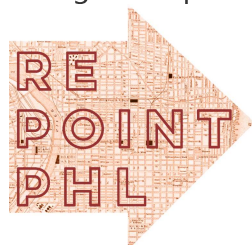
RePoint appreciates your thoughtful consideration of this matter. Thank you!

--

www.repointph.org

Twitter: @phl_re

Instagram: repointphl





July 8, 2020

Via E-mail

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

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

QUESTION PRESENTED: Under Philadelphia Code § 14-2007 and PHC Rules and Regulations, should PHC grant Applicant a permit to demolish a historically designated building where Applicant's submission demonstrates inconsistencies, ambiguities and material omissions, where structural reinforcement and stabilization have not been rigorously considered or pursued by Applicant, and where Applicant has failed to affirmatively act in good faith to abide by the legally enforceable maintenance requirement to keep a historically designated building in good repair?

BRIEF ANSWER: No. Where Applicant has demonstrated a cavalier and hurried disregard for the procedural protections intended to benefit a architecturally and culturally significant and irreplaceable asset to the City of Philadelphia, as acknowledged by its inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places ("Register"), Applicant should not be afforded the convenience of posturing under the guise of public necessity to achieve an expedited path to demolition for Applicant's own benefit.

- Applicant's assertion that demolition of the Church Building is necessary in the public interest is unpersuasive in light of the facts both preceding and following Applicant's purchase of the property.
- Since taking title to the property, Applicant has not taken any substantial measures – financial or otherwise – to reinforce or stabilize the condition of the Church Building in any meaningful way.
- Applicant's negligent stewardship of the Church Building constitutes demolition by neglect.
- Applicant's demolition permit request should be denied because it is unpersuasive in light of Applicant's aggregate actions, representations, and omissions:
 - Timeline of events proves Applicant lacked intent to preserve the Church Building.
 - Justification for immediate demolition is repetitive and unsubstantiated.
 - History of the Church Building's engineering reports exhibits high risk for bias.
 - Applicant's most recent engineering reports are skewed, ambiguous, and conjured.
 - Applicant has made no material stabilization or reinforcement improvements to maintain the Church Building in good repair during Applicant's ownership period, despite a legal obligation to do so pursuant to Philadelphia Code and PHC Rules and Regulations.
 - Applicant's demolition permit request should be deemed substantively incomplete due to failure to provide complete and specific documentation in accordance with PHC Rules and Regulations.
 - Commission should respond to the substance of Applicant's submission utilizing the full scope of regulatory authority under the Philadelphia Code and Commission Rules and Regulations.



July 10, 2020

Via E-mail

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

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

Thank you in advance for carefully considering this public comment on Philadelphia Historical Commission’s (“PHC’s”) consideration of 1600 Berks, LLC’s (“Applicant’s”) application for a building permit to demolish former St. Laurentius Church (the “Church Building”) on the basis that it is “necessary under the public interest” pursuant to Philadelphia Code § 14-1005(6)(d), providing ground for demolition of historically designated structures.

QUESTION PRESENTED

Under Philadelphia Code § 14-1000 and PHC Rules and Regulations, should PHC grant Applicant a permit to demolish a historically designated building where Applicant’s submission demonstrates inconsistencies, ambiguities and material omissions, where structural reinforcement and stabilization have not been rigorously considered or pursued by Applicant, and where Applicant has failed to affirmatively act in good faith to abide by the legally enforceable maintenance requirement to keep a historically designated building in good repair?

BRIEF ANSWER

No. Where Applicant has demonstrated a cavalier and hurried disregard for the procedural protections intended to benefit an architecturally and culturally significant and irreplaceable asset to the City of Philadelphia, as acknowledged by its inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places (“Register”), Applicant should not be afforded the convenience of posturing under the guise of public necessity to achieve an expedited path to demolition for Applicant’s own benefit.

Applicant’s assertion that demolition of the Church Building is necessary in the public interest is unpersuasive in light of the facts both preceding and following Applicant’s purchase of the property.

Applicant claims to have purchased the property from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (“AOP”) with the goal of historic rehabilitation, yet had already filed an engineering report recommending full demolition to the Department of Licenses and Inspections (“L&I”) prior to transfer of the property deed. Applicant’s initial demolition report was refuted, yet the framing and indicia of urgency closely mirror Applicant’s current submission. Both Applicant and the previous owner, AOP, have made attempts to demolish the Church Building, while building a compendium of self-financed engineering reports. The most recent engineering reports proffered by Applicant contain glaringly selective ambiguities, factual misrepresentations, material omissions, and broad generalizations.

Since taking title to the property, Applicant has not taken any substantial measures – financial or otherwise – to reinforce or stabilize the condition of the Church Building in any meaningful way.

The engineering reports included in Applicant’s current submission lack any rigorous evaluation of alternative solutions for stabilization; assumptions are asserted without any clear foundation or calculation of reason. Demolition is offered as the only practical outcome, but with no cost associated, no contractor named, no hazard and risk assessment, and therefore no true comparative benchmark by which to gauge whether any potential form of building stabilization or reinforcement would be truly over-burdensome or impractical under the circumstances. Further, none of Applicant’s sourced engineering reports make any substantive analysis around the impact of AOP’s



\$135,000 investment to stabilize the Church Building in 2019. Applicant's submission is not borne of a complete and transparent analysis of all the material facts.

Applicant's negligent stewardship of the Church Building constitutes demolition by neglect.

Applicant knowingly assumed liability for the building's maintenance, pursuant to Philadelphia Code, upon deciding to purchase the property from AOP. The physical condition and estimated cost of repair to the Church Building were well documented and publicized prior to Applicant's expression of interest in and eventual purchase of the property. Church Building's designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and the associated obligations entailed with ownership of a historically designated property are public knowledge. Applicant had a reasonably clear idea of the costs and risks associated with purchasing the Church Building. Nonetheless, Applicant has taken no affirmative steps to restore the property to good repair and instead has explored the possibility of demolition twice in the span of six months. Applicant's attention and resources have been funneled into obtaining engineering reports favoring the pursuit of demolition at the expense and instead of any focused efforts to maintain and repair the Church Building. All of this despite the fact that Applicant acquired the property for well below market rate relative to the City of Philadelphia's assessed property value.

Applicant's aforementioned actions and omissions relating to the Church Building at 1600-06 E Berks Street set forth an unpersuasive fact pattern by which to grant the demolition of a cherished piece of community where some of Philadelphia's first Polish immigrants established an American identity and where generations of faithful St. Laurentius parishioners contributed their own time, talent, and resources for the construction and improvement of their church.

To the extent the Church Building presents a public safety concern, PHC and L&I should exercise every enforcement measure available to ensure compliance with the standards required of a historically designated building as set forth by law. This includes requiring a developmental market study by way of a public request for proposals in the event that Applicant's financial status prohibits effective compliance.

DISCUSSION

Applicant's demolition permit request should be denied because it is unpersuasive in light of Applicant's aggregate actions, representations, and omissions.

a. Timeline of events infers Applicant lacked intent to preserve the Church Building.

Applicant's representation that the property was purchased "with the goal of historic preservation" is a factual unlikelihood implicitly revealed by Applicant's contradictory course of action.

In Applicant's cover letter to PHC dated July 2, 2020, Applicant's attorney asserts, "We recognize that considerable efforts to save the Church Building go back several years and that those efforts have been well known to the Commission and well reported in the media. It was in this context (*and with the goal of historic rehabilitation*) that the current owner purchased the property from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in January 2020." The aforementioned statement regarding Applicant's goal of historic preservation rings dubiously when considered in light of the facts preceding the sale, thereby casting a shadow of skepticism upon Applicant's motives.

According to City of Philadelphia property records, Applicant signed a real estate transfer tax document (the "Tax Document") for the St. Laurentius parcel, dated December 10, 2019. The Tax Document is signed on behalf of 1600 Berks, LLC (the Applicant) by Humberto Fernandini.

By December 18, 2019, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the development team submitted a specious engineering report to L&I urging full demolition of the Church Building "as soon as possible." The alarmist engineering report was promptly refuted by L&I's "team of private engineers and inspectors" who found "there has been no significant deterioration or distress observed since the last formal inspection," which took place in August 2019 after AOP invested \$135,000 to stabilize the Church Building. The report



proffered by the development team was “largely based upon old [engineering] reports and a pre-repair drone inspection.” The report blatantly neglected to account for or acknowledge the August 2019 stabilization improvements financed by AOP, which were characterized by Karen Guss of L&I as “significant work.”

According to City of Philadelphia records and the fully executed property deed signed by both Applicant and AOP, the property was officially sold to Applicant by January 6, 2020 for \$50,000. An incredibly reduced sum in comparison to the City of Philadelphia’s assessed property value of \$2,066,300. By January 14, 2020, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported the sale, noting that an agreement of sale had been assigned to Humberto Fernandini and that the prior owner had exited the deal. The article portrays Fernandini as seemingly enamored to acquire a historic Polish property; however, in retrospect and in light of the outlined sequence of events, these quotes may have been simply opportunistic and duplicitous.

Humberto Fernandini evidenced a definitive association with the development team when he signed the Tax Document dated December 10, 2020. This association afforded him full awareness of the decision to submit a single engineering report to L&I the following week with the express recommendation of immediate demolition as soon as possible. Had Fernandini truly intended to preserve the historically designated Church Building, he would have reasonably sought a second opinion from an engineering firm other than one recommending full and immediate demolition. Instead, he began to close the sale with AOP in the midst of escalating a faulty report to L&I to “explore the possibility of demolition,” as reported by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Further, Fernandini could have disclosed the timing of his association when interviewed by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, thereby providing a transparent and honest explanation for the escalation of the engineering report. Instead, Fernandini boasted righteous intent with no mention of his true organizational proximity during the December demolition “exploration” event.

Since the time the Tax Document was signed in December 2019, the Applicant has formally explored “immediate demolition” of the Church Building twice. One of these “exploration” events occurred as a first order of business before the sale of the property from AOP had closed.

None of the engineering reports produced by Applicant conduct any analysis on the reinforcement work performed by AOP in August 2019. Since the time of purchase, there is no record or evidence that Applicant has made any effort to maintain the Church Building in “good repair” pursuant to legal obligations under § 14-1006 of the Philadelphia Code, despite having full awareness of Church Building’s inclusion on the Register, and despite purchasing the property from AOP for 2.4% of assessed market value. By entering into a purchase agreement to acquire the property, Applicant assumed full liability for all obligations associated with maintaining the historic property, and has since abdicated that responsibility through demolition by neglect.

Applicant had full awareness of the deteriorating condition of the Church Building and the repair expenses associated therewith prior to purchasing the property. AOP together with St. Laurentius parishioners have established an extensive, public record of quantifiable factors with respect to the condition and restoration of the property. Fernandini purchased the property with full knowledge of extenuating circumstances, including Church Building’s historic designation and the associated obligations therewith, including the legally enforceable maintenance requirements for responsible stewardship of a historically designated building. Despite this, Fernandini’s apparent ownership strategy has favored “exploring” demolition over maintaining the property in good repair.

Given these facts, Applicant’s attorney’s assertion that the January sale of the property included a good faith “*goal of historic rehabilitation*” strikes as discouragingly unconvincing. This ostensibly false narrative of intent warrants heightened PHC scrutiny regarding all of Applicant’s claims.

b. Justification for immediate demolition is repetitive and unsubstantiated.

Applicant's current request for complete demolition of the Church Building comes on the heels of a prior demolition "exploration" event in which Applicant provided an alarmist engineering report, claiming necessity for immediate demolition of the entire Church Building.

According to a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article published by December 18, 2020, Applicant submitted an engineering report to L&I on Monday, December 16, urging that St. Laurentius be demolished "as soon as possible." The December engineering report was submitted under seal of confidentiality, without acknowledgement of AOP's "significant" August 2019 reinforcement work. It remains unclear why Applicant pursued this backdoor tactic seeking demolition advisory, instead of following transparent public protocol and submitting an application to L&I for a building permit for the purpose of demolition. One may consider that Applicant's purpose was to obscure the transition of ownership, which had been occurring simultaneously, in an effort to gather information and feedback from L&I for the purpose of building a stronger case for near-future demolition.

Through hindsight, it seems probable that Applicant would have wanted to shield from public awareness any connection between new ownership (Fernandini) and the December 2019 demolition "exploration" event. This would allow the deflection of blame toward prior ownership while maintaining the outward indicia of Fernandini's presumed innocence with respect to historic preservation in the public eye.

It is a fact that Fernandini signed the Tax Document on Applicant's behalf dated December 10, 2019. It is also a fact that Applicant's December 2019 submission of the engineering report recommending immediate demolition took place *after* (or around the time) the Tax Document had been signed. As established previously, this sequence of events supports the finding that Fernandini had both awareness of and involvement with the December 2019 submission of the engineering report recommending demolition.

The alarmist tone and justification of the December 2019 demolition recommendation closely mirrors that of the July 2020 application for demolition currently under consideration. The December 2019 recommendation was flatly refuted by L&I after an independent study of the property - not a single violation was administered in response to that inspection. Now, only six months later, it is unclear what specifically has changed other than Applicant's ability to regroup and put forth a more targeted and formal request for demolition, having previously sourced the technical feedback necessary to accomplish Applicant's presumably intended goal. If the property is imminently unsafe and an evident concern for public safety, why has L&I not sanctioned Applicant with requisite public violations in response to the Church Building's ongoing condition?

It is also curious that Applicant waited almost exactly six months from the prior request to produce this July 2020 application. The six month time period is the customary umbrella period for deferral review under PHC's rules and regulations. It is presently unclear to RePoint whether L&I abides by a similar six month time-clock with respect to the submission of engineering reports, given that the City of Philadelphia adopted the 2018 International Codes as regulatory guidance for "the purpose of regulating the construction, alteration, repair and use of buildings in Philadelphia" - and the referenced Code is not publically available, but behind a digital pay-wall. PHC should request, and L&I should make public, L&I's response to Applicant's December 2019 request for demolition to better inform the public regarding the scope of information relayed from L&I to Applicant as it materially relates to the current application.

Further, though Applicant sets forth its justification for demolition by and through the supply of self-sourced engineering reports, Applicant does not affirmatively articulate specifically which elements of the reports have materially changed with any amount of significance from the December 2019 report and L&I's subsequent refutation. Applicant's engineering reports do not evaluate the feasibility of alternative options with the thorough scrutiny and rigor reflective of a desire to preserve the Church Building. Unverified assumptions and generalizations are set forth as fact. Proposals are introduced with only partial consideration for available options while muddied with arbitrary contingencies and conditions. No scope of work or cost estimates for stabilization are provided. The complete menu of options and possibilities is not reasonably made clear.

Given the questionable characterization of Applicant’s submission established in Section I.a of this letter, it should follow that any technical claim made here by either Applicant or Applicant’s hired partners should be viewed with skepticism in light of Applicant’s other, potentially disingenuous claims.

Why has Applicant refused to acknowledge and assess the material impact of AOP’s 2019 stabilization work? Why do the Applicant’s self-financed engineering reports not articulate the material impact of AOP’s 2019 stabilization work? Will the compendium of prior engineering reports used as justification by Applicant be made publicly available for full review and scrutiny? Why did Applicant submit their prior engineering report under seal of confidentiality in December 2019 and not through a formal public permit application? Why did Humberto Fernandini fail to publicly acknowledge his involvement with the December 2019 demolition “exploration” event? What was L&I’s specific response to Applicant’s December 2019 engineering report? Why has L&I’s response not been published for public review? Why has L&I not performed an independent inspection and review in response to this permit application as they did previously in response to the 2019 engineering report? What specific material changes have occurred in the six month period since L&I investigated and refuted Applicant’s December engineering report? If the Church Building is truly imminently dangerous, why has L&I not sanctioned Applicant with violations? Why have L&I and PHC not enforced the maintenance and good repair obligations required of owners of historically designated properties under Philadelphia law? Why has applicant not performed any noteworthy upkeep or repair in the six months since their prior (refuted) request for urgent demolition of the Church Building? Why has Applicant not provided exact specifications and costs for each iterative possibility ranging between demolition and full restoration of the property to provide for a complete and measured cost-benefit analysis? Why is L&I enabling Applicant, who has potentially knowingly misrepresented a proclivity for historic preservation, to fast-track the demolition of a historic asset at the public’s expense based on dubious alarmism and unverified, self-serving claims?

There are far too many reasonable questions and legitimate doubts surrounding this application for PHC and L&I to allow for the approval of this demolition permit in good faith. Applicant’s request should be denied, relevant material should be made publicly available, and interim safeguards should be enforced.

c. History of the Church Building’s engineering reports exhibits high risk for bias.

“The Department did not do an independent analysis of whether or not the building could be stabilized without an unreasonable risk to the public or to workers. So again the Department agrees that the building is in an unsafe condition but no independent determination was made by the Department or an independent engineer, that is not one hired by the owner, assessing what other repairs – emergency repairs – would be feasible.” –Leonard Reuter, Philadelphia Historical Commission Meeting on 12 June 2020, relating to another matter.

The aforementioned quote pertains to the issue of self-regulation and trust. Perhaps, the idea of a self-financed audit isn’t always a good idea. There is a reason why audit provisions in commercial contracts are often hotly contested and negotiated. There is risk associated with allowing a party to source and influence its own audit. Here, an engineer report represents an audit of the condition of the Church Building. Without independent verification, veracity cannot be indisputably affirmed.

Prior engineering reports referenced in this matter were financed and produced by a previous owner (AOP) who aggressively sought demolition and opposed historic designation of the Church Building as an encumbrance to AOP’s goal of demolition. Now, current owner presents reports from an apparent shared perspective.

There have not been adequate engineering reports sourced and produced by parties invested in the preservation of this historic building. Nor have there been a sufficient number of independent engineering reports to verify findings.

In the past decade, the Church Building has a history of property owners unsuccessfully seeking and failing to obtain full demolition. It is from this lineage of ownership that we receive the compendium of

engineering reports on record, where most reports were self-financed by owners with specific intent to demolish.

d. Applicant’s most recent engineering reports are skewed, ambiguous, and misleading.

The Harman Group

The engineering report from the Harman Group (“Harman Report”) sourced and submitted by Applicant assesses a 100% probability of structural collapse of portions of the Church Buildings spires (the “Towers”) within the next 10 years. Further, the report specifies an 80% probability of structural collapse of portions of the Towers within the next 3 years. However, the report does not specify which portions of the Towers, specifically, are most at risk for collapse. The report does not specify how large or small the portions in question may be. Nor does the Harman Report specify the precise calculations or methodology employed to arrive at the numeric predictions around probability and length of time. The report’s Purpose and Scope section indicates that Harman Group performed only a “visual review of two northern corner towers.” Is a snapshot visual review truly adequate to predict timing of failure? How can the Harman Group show that its predications are accurate and not representative of over-conservative or dramatic guesswork based on what are cosmetically perceived to be alarming conditions? There is no indication that the Harman Group took measurements at the time of their site visit, much less over the course of an extended period of time, by which to gauge the actual degree and severity of any definitive rate of change or rate of acceleration of any cracks, openings, separations, or movements. What was Harman Group’s benchmark for comparison?

Once again, Applicant requires PHC and the public to accept broad claims at face value. There is no justifiable reason for the Harman Group not to include an explanatory methodology for assessing the probability and timeframe of collapse, particularly when considering that this assessment reflects the fundamental question at issue pertaining to public safety. The Harman Group asserts that reinforcing the Towers will be “challenging,” yet provides lack of specificity and explanation as to what those challenges entail. There is no mention of consideration for targeted reinforcement or stabilization focused on those specific parts of the Towers most at risk, much less any specific recommendations for stabilization. Reinforcement and repair potential is unconvincingly passed off as “not possible” due to ambiguous and unspecific claims around accessibility and degradation of materials. What exactly is meant by “*not possible?*” Is this a physical determination? Economic? What careful calculations were deployed to come to this rather extreme and damning determination?

Both individual Towers are assessed with the same treatment as a single, interconnected unit. There is no specificity around the unique condition of either individual Tower. PHC and the public are asked to assume and accept that both Towers possess the exact same condition of deterioration and instability.

The Harman Group references that removal and rebuilding of the Towers “will require adding a stability structure within the center section.” What exactly does this mean? Is this a reference to temporary shoring? Or does it mean permanent reinforcement? Wouldn’t demolition require some level of reinforcement, too?

Thornton Tomasetti

The second engineering report, also sourced by Applicant, comes from Thornton Tomasetti (the “TT Report”). Based on the TT Report, it is not clear if the inspector even visited the property; the review is cursory and cosmetic, potentially based on pictures or images provided to the firm.

The TT Report is primarily composed of recounted summaries of past reports, many of which (if not all) were sourced by property owners seeking demolition. Beyond this, there are false claims.

The TT Report summarizes the Ortega Consulting Report (the “Ortega Report”) dated April 24, 2014. The TT Report asserts, “Mr. Ortega . . . confirms the need to demolish the towers.” Nowhere in the Ortega Report is such a statement definitively made. Instead, the report is quoted as follows: “[I]t is premature to

assume that the conditions are irreparable, or that the towers must be demolished.” This is a direct contradiction of the TT Report’s claim that the Ortega Report recommends demolition. This exceedingly obvious and blatant inconsistency invokes doubt regarding the veracity of the TT Report’s summaries of prior engineering reports, the confirmation of the Harman Report, and of the TT Report itself.

Further, the Ortega Report asserts:

“Because the masonry tower is built around a timber frame structure, which supports most of the tower functions, including the roof, it is very unlikely that either tower will collapse or fall over in its entirety.”

The report continues:

“However, there is a high likelihood that without some sort of repair intervention, a failure of the tower masonry would involve the sudden collapse, or sloughing, of a large portion of one or more wall, into a pile of loose stone at the base of the tower”

RePoint notes that Mr. Ortega’s forecast regarding “sloughing,” unfortunately came to fruition, as documented by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, on two separate occasions in January and May of 2019. It was in response to these events that AOP invested \$135,000 to reinforce the Towers in August of 2019. For reasons stated in the Ortega Report, the AOP reinforcement of August 2019 is material to the current condition of the Towers and needs to be evaluated and analyzed with specificity by Applicant and L&I.

Unlike the Harman Report and the TT Report, the Ortega Report proposes cost-efficient solutions for temporary stabilization. Proposed solutions include disposal of all bio-hazard (bird carcasses and droppings) from the Towers, and “[i]n addition to compression bands and netting, install timber, or aluminum dunnage on each face of each tower across the window and louver openings and tie them together through the towers with tie rods, or cables, to prevent any additional outward movement of the walls.” The report continues, “[t]hese measures should be sufficient to mitigate the safety issues for the foreseeable future If [the] first step is limited to just the bio-hazard removal and the temporary stabilization, the cost should be significantly less than estimated [previously].”

These suggestions for phased, progressive stabilization by the Ortega Report are practical and solution-oriented. Conversely, Applicant’s engineering reports by Harman and Thornton Tomasetti offer no such recommendations, and focus entirely on arriving at the result of demolition without rigorous consideration for alternative solutions.

The TT Report counters, “[s]imply tying the walls together to prevent further outward movement will not address the overall instability resulting from deterioration of the masonry joints.” This determination seems to directly address the proposal set forth in the Ortega Report, but does not specify a reasonable timeframe for adequacy. Is this method not adequate for a temporary period as part of a larger effort to progressively restore or rebuild the Towers? In seemingly typical fashion, Applicant’s engineering reports require PHC and the public to accept sweeping statements with no qualifications or conditions associated. The TT Report arbitrarily references Ortega’s mitigation proposal as if intended as a permanent solution.

Finally, the TT Report proposes that the construction cost for rebuilding the Towers would most likely exceed \$4.5M. However, no specificity is provided regarding the methods that would be employed. How can PHC or the public be sure that the \$4.5M cost is based on fair methodology when the specifications for reconstruction are not included? Does this account for both Towers in their entirety? Is there any potential for reconstruction of Towers in partiality? Are the reconstruction materials proposed of the highest quality, or merely reasonable and sufficient? As usual, there is no methodical explanation for the calculation.

- e. **Applicant has made no material stabilization or reinforcement improvements to maintain the Church Building in good repair during Applicant’s ownership period, despite a legal obligation to do so pursuant to Philadelphia Code and PHC Rules and Regulations.**



Philadelphia Code and PHC Rules and Regulations clearly stipulate a maintenance obligation as follows:

“The exterior of every historic building, structure, and object . . . shall be kept in good repair . . . neglect of which may cause or tend to cause the historic portion to deteriorate, decay, or become damaged, or otherwise fall into a state of disrepair.”

The Church Building was listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places as a historically designated building in July 2015. The Philadelphia Register of Historic Places is publicly accessible and considered to be public knowledge. Applicant had full awareness of this fact prior to consent to enter into an agreement of sale and eventual purchase. There are legally enforceable rules and regulations associated with care and maintenance for historically designated properties pursuant to Philadelphia Code and PHC’s Rules and Regulations. Those rules require maintenance to keep a designated building in good repair, particularly to avoid continued deterioration or decay. It was well documented by various engineering reports and other sources prior to Applicant’s purchase of the property that the historically designated Church Building was actively deteriorating and not in good repair. By purchasing the property, under law, Applicant willingly assumed the obligation and liability associated with maintaining the historically designated property in good repair. From the time of Applicant’s purchase of the property, no affirmative steps have been taken by Applicant to meaningfully mitigate the continued deterioration or decay of the property. Instead, Applicant motioned L&I to explore full demolition twice in the short span of roughly six months of ownership. In fact, the first motion to explore full demolition of the historic Church Building occurred prior to closing of the sale, when Applicant had signed the property Tax Document a mere week prior. This fact pattern illustrates a clear abdication for the obligations and liabilities assumed by the purchase, and a complete disregard for preservation law under Philadelphia Code and the PHC Rules and Regulations. This sequence of events and negligent stewardship is both reckless toward public safety and irreverent toward the rule of law. In the time since Applicant filed the first demolition request, there has been no serious inquiry regarding any repair, stabilization, maintenance, or other good faith stewardship of the property. PHC and L&I should exercise every enforcement measure available to ensure that Applicant complies in good faith with the obligations willingly and knowingly assumed by purchasing the property.

Further, under PHC Rule 13.2, “[i]n the event that the Commission staff has reason to reason to regard a condition as posing the threat of demolition by neglect . . . the staff shall request, within five (5) working days, that the Department of Licenses and Inspections examine the property with a Commission staff member, report its findings to the Commission staff, and, upon the request of the staff, issue an order to repair the conditions.”

Based on the fact pattern at hand, pursuant to Applicant’s sheer disregard for applicable maintenance and repair obligations, it would be appropriate for the PHC to pursue enforcement in conjunction with L&I under the aforementioned Demolition by Neglect standard set forth in the Philadelphia Code.

f. Applicant’s demolition permit request should be deemed substantively incomplete due to failure to provide complete and specific documentation in accordance with PHC Rules and Regulations.

Rule 12 of PHC’s Rules and Regulations sets forth the requirements applicable to an application for Demolition in the Public Interest, such as applies in this case. Subpart 12.2 (“Submission Requirements”) stipulates, “The applicant must submit the forms, photographs, drawings, and other documents stipulated in Section 6.7 of these Rules and Regulations. The applicant must provide documentation demonstrating the necessity of demolition in the public interest.” This provision is not optional, but a requirement.

Pursuant to the aforementioned requirement, Section 6.7 delineates a number of requirements, some of which are seemingly missing from Applicant’s submission in this case.

Applicant in this case did not provide required information under Rule 6.7.e, as follows:

“For applications proposing work to designated exteriors, a legible dimensioned, accurately-scaled plot or site plan and legible, dimensioned, accurately scaled drawings of all elevations to which alterations are

proposed . . . If demolition is proposed, the area(s) of demolition must be clearly delineated on the drawings. All drawings must be annotated and/or be accompanied by a complete set of specifications that described the undertaking in detail. For less complex projects, annotated photographs and/or photomontages with notes and/or specifications may be acceptable in lieu of drawings.”

Pursuant to the aforementioned section, Applicant does not provide any drawings, but for those provided in the Harman Group engineering report. The Harman Report contains only two drawings, representing a single Tower, and does not specify which Tower is being represented. Regarding the demolition requirement, the photographs provided by applicant include no demarcations or annotations to suggest any future plans. There is no “complete set of specifications that describe the undertaking in detail.” In fact, there is no information about the demolition plan whatsoever. Costs are not specified. A licensed demolition contractor is not named. There is no risk or hazard analysis. There is no operational plan. There is no map representing the area to be impacted by proposed demolition. The absence of these required specifications are alarming from a public safety perspective. Demolitions are a technical and dangerous undertaking. The Church Building is located in a relatively tight residential corridor. If the Applicant were to move forward with a faulty demolition plan, the result could potentially be much more devastating and harmful to the public interest than any temporary stabilization of the property or delay incurred to appoint a remediation plan.

Further, the absence of these requirements is more egregious when considering that Applicant specifically explored full demolition of the entire Church Building in December 2019. Therefore, Applicant has enjoyed the leisure of a six month time period by which to develop and submit a demolition plan with this application. The fact that no plan has been delivered represents, once more, Applicant’s disregard for legal obligations and process. RePoint believes that PHC should deny this Application on the merits, but there is equal justification for PHC to deny this application based on procedural disregard.

Nor does Applicant provide required information under PHC Rule 6.7g, as follows:

“Legible, dimensioned, accurately-scaled, detail or shop drawings of all features to be replaced and/or reconstructed. Such features may include but are not limited to doors, door frames, window frames and sash, shutters, cellar bulkheads, cornices, dormers, mantels, and stairways.”

Again, Applicant’s initial exploration of immediate demolition transpired in December 2019. Since that time, Applicant has undertaken to obtain two separate engineering reports, ostensibly for the purpose of supplementing its request for demolition. Why did Applicant not deem it necessary to provide the requisite replacement plans as required by PHC’s rules and regulations? Applicant has demonstrated continued intent to pursue demolition since December 2019, and yet willfully disregarded this portion of the rules out of selective convenience.

Failure to comply with PHC’s Rules and Regulations should count as a strike against Applicant. The necessity of public interest cannot be adequately determined without a complete submission under the Rules. Applicant should not be excused from abiding by PHC’s straightforward body of Rules and Regulations. In the event that a collapse or partial collapse were to occur without submission and approval of demolition and reconstruction plans, PHC in partnership with L&I, should require a complete reconstruction by Applicant to Church Building’s original specification as a default measure.

g. Applicant’s demolition permit request should be deemed substantively incomplete due to failure to provide complete and specific documentation in accordance with PHC Rules and Regulations.

Applicant’s submission is framed as “Necessary to the Public Interest.” However, Applicant also relies on additional theories, such as “no practical use,” as evidenced in Applicant’s cover letter. Given that Applicant has invoked this theory, PHC should respond in kind. Applicant’s attorney asserts, “the Structural Condition Reports both conclude that any attempt at emergency repair or tower stabilization would be infeasible (if not impossible), very time consuming, and extremely dangerous.” In essence, this is an admission that Applicant can ascertain no practical use for the Towers of the Church Building as



currently constructed. Fortunately, the Commission retains authority to assist property owners of historically designated buildings who find themselves in such a predicament.

Under § 14-1005(5)(b)(7) of the Philadelphia Code, “[i]n any instance where there is a claim that a building, structure, site, or object cannot be used for any purpose for which it is or may be reasonably adapted . . . The Commission may further require the owner to conduct, at the owner’s expense, evaluations or studies, as are reasonably necessary in the opinion of the Commission, to determine whether the building, structure, site, or object has or may have alternate uses consistent with preservation.”

Pursuant to the aforementioned authority under the Code, in consideration for Applicant’s claim that the Towers cannot reasonably be adapted for any purpose, PHC should promptly require Applicant, at Applicant’s expense, to conduct a market analysis in the form of a public request for proposals (“RFP”) for the safe and cost-conscious development of the Church Building Towers to determine whether the Towers may have use or alternate uses consistent with preservation.

This solicitation of proposals would provide Applicant with immediate market-based knowledge to substantiate Applicant’s claim. In the event that proposals for development reveal to Applicant and PHC that the Towers may, in fact, be reasonably used or adapted for a purpose consistent with preservation in the spirit of public safety, and pursuant to considerations set forth in § 14-1005(6)(e), then Applicant will have succeeded in sourcing a path forward in the spirit of compliance with their obligations to maintain the property in good repair under the law. In the event that the solicitation of proposals reveals a path forward to PHC, but Applicant refuses to move forward in a spirit of compliance, then PHC shall have full authority to issue an order to repair for demolition by neglect pursuant to Commission Rule 13.2.

CONCLUSION

For the above stated reasons, considered both individually and as an interconnected sum of parts, Applicant’s request for a building permit to demolish the Church Building, formerly known as St. Laurentius, should be denied.

Sincerely,

RePoint Philadelphia
repointphila@gmail.com

RePoint is a nonpartisan political action committee (PAC) based in Philadelphia. We are preservation advocates supported by a network of activists, volunteers, and Philadelphia citizens. Our name, RePoint, is derived from the process of “repointing” or repairing the mortar joints in masonry walls, evoking the foundational building blocks of many significant structures in our great city.

NIKIL 2020
SAVAL
DEMOCRAT FOR STATE SENATE

July 10, 2020

Jonathan Farnham
1515 Arch St
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mr. Farnham:

I am writing to express my hope that the Philadelphia Historical Commission will take every reasonable measure possible to preserve St. Laurentius Church. (My partner, Shannon Garrison, is a staff member of the Historical Commission.)

As the Democratic nominee for State Senate in the First Senate District, which includes St. Laurentius, as well as a writer who covers architecture, city planning, and design, I feel strongly that St. Laurentius is an extraordinary work whose loss to the city's fabric would be incalculable. Moreover, I join the Zoning Board of Adjustment, the Mayor, three Commonwealth Court Judges and seventeen City Council members who supported the adaptive reuse of the building. As members of the Historical Commission well understand, demolition is a resource of last resort; it is in the interests of all of our broader environmental, planning, and development goals to seek to preserve structures of this kind.

Thank you for considering my comment. I am hoping that the Historical Commission can find the resources to preserve this building and its continued value to the surrounding community and the city of Philadelphia.

Sincerely,

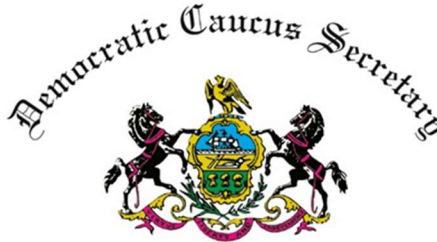


Nikil Saval

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RULES & EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS
POLICY

Senate of Pennsylvania

July 9, 2020

Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: Demolition Permit for Saint Laurentius Church, 1600-1606 E. Berks Street

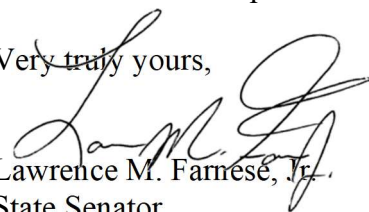
Dear Members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission:

I am joining over 200 Fishtown neighbors, Council President Darrell Clarke, members of city council and many other elected officials to oppose the demolition of Saint Laurentius Church. This historic structure was built in the 1880's and has served as an important part of the neighborhood for over a century. The demolition of this property should be rejected due to significant community opposition.

Since the church was closed in 2014 by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia people in the Fishtown neighborhood, Council President Clarke and many others have worked numerous hours for a development plan that includes keeping the facade and structure intact. The community has come together to support saving the church and finding a smart reuse for the property. The community supports the Philadelphia City Council approved conversion of Saint Laurentius into 23 apartments or condominium units.

The current owner of the Saint Laurentius Church would like to demolish the Church and with it the history and community affection of the Fishtown neighborhood. This is not wise development or good for the Fishtown community. Many engineers have looked at the property and offered varying thoughts on whether to fix or demolish this property. I am not an engineer, but during my 12 years in elective office, I have found that fixing properties, saving historical assets, working with the community, and reusing properties is smart development and offers many benefits in the long run for the project and the community.

For all of the reasons above, I urge you to oppose the demolition permit.

Very truly yours,

Lawrence M. Farnese, Jr.
State Senator
1st Senatorial District

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

Saint Laurentius

KW

Kelly E. Wiles <kelly.e.wiles@gmail.com>

Thu 7/9/2020 10:41 PM

To: preservation

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I am unable to attend the meeting tomorrow but writing to express my strong objections to the demolition of Saint Laurentius. We just saw this happen in my neighborhood with Christ Church at 43rd and Chestnut. Too many buildings are lost it seems daily. Please utilize some of your power here and don't let the greedy developer win and add this one to the list of casualties!

Kelly E. Wiles

Board Member, University City Historical Society

Sent from my iPhone

Fwd: St. Laurentius Demolition permit

preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Tue 7/21/2020 3:09 PM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Laura DiPasquale Zupan
Historic Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

From: Barbara Wolf <barbmwolf@comcast.net>**Sent:** Friday, July 10, 2020 10:20 AM**To:** preservation**Subject:** St. Laurentius Demolition permit

External Email Notice. This email comes from outside of City government. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender.

Robert Thomas, Chairman

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director Philadelphia Historical Commission 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor Philadelphia, PA 19102**RE: St. Laurentius Church, 1600-06 E. Berks Street, Philadelphia, PA**

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed demolition of St. Laurentius Church. Approval of this request would not only destroy an important historically designated religious building, but set a terrible precedent for the future, with developers falsely claiming their intent to preserve historic properties, only to then neglect basic improvements needed to stabilize and secure the property. This indeed seems to have been the process by which the current developers are working. I have reviewed REPOINT's summary of the history of this developer's actions and fully agree with their recommendations for the Historic Commission to deny this request for demolition. I am very concerned by the quick turn around of developer's claim for preservation goals, and then a rapid shift to requesting demolition on grounds of unsafe conditions. In cases like this, it seems essential not to trust engineering reports from agencies paid by and closely aligned with the developers. Independent engineering reports are essential. Please reject this application for demolition!

Sincerely,
Barbara M. Wolf
656 North 15th Street
Philadelphia, 19130