

**PUBLIC COMMENT FOR
156 W. SCHOOL HOUSE LANE**

The Children's Center for Communication Beverly School for the Deaf

Where Communication Comes First- Since 1876

June 28, 2022

Dr. Jonathan Farnhan
Philadelphia Historical Commission
One Parkway, 13th Floor
1515 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19102

Re: Letter of support - Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD)

Dear Dr. Farnham,

I am pleased to write this letter of support for PSD as they look to better develop their campus and further support Deaf and hard of hearing children.

Greetings from The Beverly School for the Deaf, also known as The Children's Center for Communication (or CCCBSD). www.cccbsd.org. Our institution has been located in Beverly, Massachusetts for the past 146 years. We have served the communities of Massachusetts and New Hampshire on our campus as both a day and residential school since 1876. Due to a shift in parental preference, our dorm closed in 2004 and a 90 year old building was razed as we shifted to better support disabled Deaf children.

During the past 12 years we have created a campus that is 100% accessible for all students and have incorporated innovative technology like universal design (UD) and universal design for learning (UDL). Given the broad needs of our students - physically modifying or constructing a setting unique from our historic past has not only been a must, it has been legally required.

Our schools may look different from their original design but the educational culture is still, today, focused on Deaf or hard of hearing children. We respect and value our past while recognizing the education and therapeutic needs of children will continue to evolve.

School design has changed - from educational technology to student safety - places like PSD and CCCBSD are no different from other public or private schools. At our school there was initial opposition from the community to demolish our dormitory arguing it was part of the fabric of the neighborhood. After inviting our neighbors and community leaders into the school they quickly understood that the memories of ivy growing up an outdated inaccessible dormitory were incomparable to the needs of our students.

Schools for the Deaf have played an integral role in our communities. I am confident that PSD is committed to both the history **and** the future of the neighborhood.

Dr. Mark Carlson
President/CEO

Phone: 978.927.7070 VP: 978.338.4861
www.cccbsd.org



6 Echo Avenue, Beverly MA 01915
Fax: 978.927.6536

Please Preserve 156 W. School House Lane

ronrumford dolanmaxwell

Fri 8/19/2022 12:32 PM

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.

Please do not allow the demolition of the house at 156 W School House Lane. It adds a lot to the historic nature of Germantown and as a resident I feel good about seeing this property intact and well maintained.

The owners really should sell rather than tear down such a beautiful house.

Regards,

Ron Rumford



PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

for greater philadelphia

August 22, 2022

Philadelphia Historical Commission
c/o Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: 156 W. School House Lane, Philadelphia, PA

Dear Dr. Farnham and Members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission,

We are writing to express our opposition to the request to demolish the above-referenced property, as part of a request for financial hardship submitted by the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD). As we expressed at the time of the property's designation, we have great respect for the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf and its mission. We do not wish to alienate a public-serving institution such as PSD.

However, we do not feel the applicants have made the argument that the subject property – per the language of the historic preservation ordinance - “cannot be used for any purpose for which it is or may be reasonably adapted,” nor, that “sale of the property is impracticable, that commercial rental cannot provide a reasonable rate of return, and that other potential uses of the property are foreclosed.” As is alluded to in the PHC staff summary, prior to PSD's acquisition of the property, a multi-family residential conversion was proposed by a different prospective buyer in 2019.

In fact, the market for multi-family apartments in Philadelphia is well-known to be quite strong at present, suggesting that conversion of this building into such a use could well result in its restoration and long-term preservation. Granting the school's request for financial hardship would surely foreclose this possibility and result in the demolition of this historically designated structure.

The school has perhaps presented a reasonable argument that the property cannot be reasonably adapted to meet *its own* programmatic needs. However, that does not demonstrate that the subject property cannot meet *any* programmatic needs.

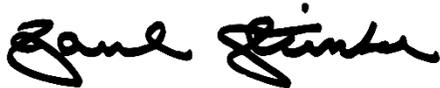
However, until it is more thoroughly demonstrated that the subject property has no viable reuse, regardless of the owner or tenant, the request for financial hardship should be denied. The school knowingly acquired this property while a nomination was pending before the Philadelphia Historical Commission. As such, the school knowingly assumed the risk that the building might soon fall under the full protective jurisdiction of the Historical Commission and its ordinance, which it in fact did.

Again, we are not unsympathetic to the school, the community it serves, or its needs. But it is nonetheless our mission to advocate for the effective stewardship of historic properties, particularly those such as 156 W. School House Lane, which has been found to have sufficient merit to be listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, and for which a convincing case has not yet been made that there is no conceivable potential for reuse.

As a result, we recommend that the Committee on Financial Hardship render a “no” vote in response to the application before them.

I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Steinke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "P".

Paul Steinke
Executive Director



AMERICAN
SCHOOL FOR
THE
DEAF

ALL ways able.

July 5, 2022

Dr. Jonathan E. Farnham
Executive Director
Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA. 19102

Dear Dr. Farnham:

It is my pleasure to submit this letter of support on behalf of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD) and their renovation plans to benefit deaf and hard of hearing students.

In 2013, the American School for the Deaf opened our Gallaudet Clerc Education Center (GCEC), a state-of-the-art building specially designed to meet the unique learning styles of our students. The former Gallaudet Hall, built in 1919, was typical of the academic buildings of that era - a large building with small, dark classrooms and long, narrow hallways that almost resembled a maze. Harsh interior lighting was prominent due to the presence of very little natural light. Though Gallaudet Hall captured the hearts of our alumni and was revered in the community for its historic significance, its design was not suited to the language and communication needs of our students and was, therefore, not conducive to the education of highly visual learners.

In contrast to Gallaudet Hall, ASD's Gallaudet Clerc Education Center was designed in collaboration with a Deaf architect who had an innate understanding of the best design elements that would allow deaf and hard of hearing learners to thrive in the classroom. The building's large windows, equipped with specialized shades and deflectors, allow for an abundance of natural filtered light, both in the classrooms and common areas. The colors featured in the GCEC are soft, and the building's lighting fixtures transmit indirect light to reduce glare. Hallways are extra wide to allow students and staff to walk side-by-side while communicating in their natural language – American Sign Language (ASL). Hallway intersections are beveled to provide clear sight lines and avoid unintentional collisions with those passing by.

Communication access within the GCEC is paramount – television monitors are found throughout the building to relay important daily updates, as well as accessible emergency alerts in ASL during fire alarms, lockdowns or other emergency situations. Additionally, the GCEC is equipped with cutting edge sound amplification technology, which includes transmitters in every classroom and common area that syncs directly with hearing aids and cochlear implants – allowing students who benefit from this technology to receive auditory information clearly without background noise. These features would not have been possible in the former Gallaudet Hall, and ASD's GCEC is a symbol of progress within the field of Deaf Education.

The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is requesting the opportunity to provide this same unparalleled access to education for their students. In 2018, PSD expanded their campus through the purchase of a 1-acre lot with plans to develop a Student Activity Center that will serve as a hub for both curricular and extra-curricular activities for their students. Located on that property is an unoccupied building that is in

a severe state of disrepair. Not only would the renovation of this building create a significant financial hardship to PSD, but the current renovation options for that building would also not allow for the same barrier-free learning environment as described in ASD's Gallaudet Clerc Education Center. It is in the best interest of not only PSD and the surrounding community, but also the hundreds of current and future deaf and hard of hearing students who will call PSD home, to demolish this outdated and inadequate building and build in its place a specially designed space for their students.

Although we all understand the value of our history and our past, we also recognize the need to continually adapt to meet the realities of today. Deaf Education has progressed over the past two hundred years, and our educational buildings must also evolve to reflect the advancements of our time. Though change is never easy, we must be willing to embrace the changes necessary for the betterment of our students.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to educational progress for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey S. Bravin
Executive Director

Cc: Peter Bailey, Head of School, Pennsylvania School for the Deaf

630 Fairview Road
Suite 100
Swarthmore, PA 19081



(610) 604-0450 (voice/tty)
Fax: (610) 604-0456
www.dhcc.org

June 27, 2022

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Historical Commission, City of Philadelphia

Dear Dr. Farnham;

DHCC and the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf share a long history and a common interest in making Pennsylvania and particularly, the Philadelphia-region one of the most welcoming communities for its Deaf, hard of hearing and Deaf-Blind population.

For 50 years, we have worked hand-in-hand to address these needs: as PSD focuses on early-intervention and school-age individuals, we continue to work with that community after they graduate from school, enter the workforce, and live independent lives.

Members of the Historical Commission will be familiar with DHCC's work - you've seen our ASL interpreters next to the Mayor at press conferences and if you received your COVID vaccinations through the City, you saw me providing instructions in American Sign Language on the TV screens there.

One of the most important elements in regards to this community is having spaces that are not just welcoming, but expressly designed for their needs. At DHCC, when we began setting up our community room, we paid special attention to elements of "Deaf Space". These are architectural and design guidelines that are intended to create a harmonious visual and sensory environment allowing the Deaf child to interact with others in a way that eliminates the extra work they have to do to fully understand the lessons they are learning. PSD will be using these guidelines to create an activity and learning space that fully serves the needs of these students.

Boxwood may be an old building, but it is not unique nor is it historical. As the petitioners (Penn-Knox) noted, there are many examples of the style and by the same architect elsewhere in the region. Further, Boxwood's "history" pales in comparison to the history of its neighbor, PSD, which is an actual and documented place that President George Washington and our governments retreated to during a much-earlier epidemic in the City.

Further, as prior owners have let it degrade into poor condition, such investment by PSD to preserve a building in this state will detract from the education of Deaf, hard of hearing, and DeafBlind children who already face significant challenges.

The Historical Commission for the City of Philadelphia has a difficult charge: it must preserve the essential history of the City while ensuring that the City can continue to be useful and beneficial for its present residents.

PSD has an opportunity to create an outstanding center for Deaf education that respects the history of the site while making sure that the Deaf, hard of hearing, and DeafBlind students that come from the City receive an education like no other.

DHCC supports the demolition of the current building on the property as being necessary for the public interest. Further, the historic designation and being forced to work within the design of the existing building (which is already unsuitable for its purpose) means that PSD would have to take money away from the students it is chartered to educate to satisfy those demands.

In conjunction with the previously stated notes regarding the building not being architecturally or historically significant, we believe that demolition and the construction of a new student activities building is in the best interests of the City of Philadelphia and the residents of Pennsylvania.

Sincerely;

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil McDevitt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Neil McDevitt

Executive Director

Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre, Inc.

against demolishing 156 W. School House Lane

Grace Flisser <gfliss18@gmail.com>

Sun 8/21/2022 1:27 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Hello:

The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, which bought the Boxwood property at 156 W. School House Lane in Germantown, is claiming financial hardship so that it doesn't have to spend money to repair this property. They bought it at a point when it was already nominated for a historic designation, which it then received.

The structure at the property is a beautiful house that adds value and charm to our entire Penn Knox neighborhood. We support PSD in its wishes to ADD more structures to its property in order to help the children who attend the school, but we oppose tearing down the property itself. Instead, we hope that PSD will apply for available funds that will help them to properly restore and maintain this structure, which they have declined to do although the designation was received over a year ago.

Thank you for your attention.

Grace Flisser, Recording Secretary for Penn Knox Neighborhood Association

156 W School House Lane

Meghan Kelly <meghancanfly@gmail.com>

Sun 8/21/2022 8:43 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Cc: Georgette Bartell <geobartell@gmail.com>

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To the Philadelphia Historical Society,

As a neighbor directly across the street from 156 W School House Lane, I would like to voice my opposition to tearing down the house known as "Boxwood." We were in support of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf buying the property because they take such great care of their grounds and facilities. It was our understanding that they would treat this historic home like the rest of their beautiful historic buildings.

I strongly oppose tearing down this beautiful old home to put up a parking lot. It shows a shameful disregard for the importance of these buildings and their significance to our community, and our Philadelphian heritage.

Kind regards,

--

Meghan Kelly
147 W School House Ln,
Philadelphia PA



260 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, NY 11225

Voice: 718-636-4573

VP: 347-227-0891

Fax: 718-636-4577

school@sfdesales.org

sfdesales.org

Follow us at [@sfdesales](https://twitter.com/sfdesales)

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph. D.

Philadelphia Historical Commission

Historical Commission

One Parkway, 13th Floor

1515 Arch Street

Philadelphia, PA 19102

June 30, 2022

Our Case for Support

For more than 200 years, Pennsylvania School for the Deaf has fulfilled an educational mission of profound value, opening worlds of discovery and possibility to Deaf and hard-of-hearing students. As one of the nationally recognized leaders in the field of Deaf Education, PSD is not only one of the oldest institutions of its kind in the United States, but also a pioneer in innovative best practices. At the School, we immerse students in a language-rich environment and embrace the model of bilingual education, in which American Sign Language (ASL) and English are recognized and taught as distinct and equally essential languages.

In 1984, PSD purchased its current home – nine-acre and the 5th campus, the former Germantown Academy Campus, and completely renovated it while preserving its unique historic character. Our nine-acre campus is in many ways ideal. Ancient trees shade lovely and historic stone buildings, and many of the educational spaces within these buildings support the school's program effectively. Many of the buildings on PSD's Germantown campus have a rich history. Some date back to the Revolutionary War times when the school was used as a hospital during the Battle of Germantown. During the Yellow Fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1792, both the Pennsylvania State Assembly and the U.S. Congress took refuge in PSD's buildings. President George Washington also set up a temporary office in our Administration Building and held cabinet meetings there.

PSD serves students from Philadelphia and 32 surrounding districts. Our students are highly diverse in terms of ability and background, and the school supports each with an individual educational plan. More than 80 percent of our students live below the Federal poverty threshold, meaning that the entire student body qualifies for free breakfast and lunch.

In addition to our Pre-K, Elementary School, Middle School, and High School divisions, PSD serves young children from birth to age 3 through a home- and center-based Early Intervention program and offers a growing Transition Program for students preparing to enter the workforce after graduating. From toddler play groups to

in-home support and ASL instruction for parents of Deaf children, PSD seeks to meet families wherever they are in their educational journeys.

PSD welcomes students into a learning environment that is joyous, enriching, and empowering. On our campus, Deaf and hard-of-hearing children find a community of people like themselves and have the constant opportunity to communicate directly with those around them. Here, teachers and school leaders sign—meaning students can interact directly, without need of an interpreter. And that is only the start. Our school nurse, our cafeteria workers, our bus drivers, and many of our security guards are all proficient in ASL as well.

Children communicate directly with faculty, classmates and peers in class, on the playground, and during sports. They see—and stage—Deaf performances and encounter the richness of Deaf culture. They are surrounded by role models who are themselves Deaf—both adults and older students. All this means they have the chance to develop depth and maturity in ASL that they couldn't match in a district school. Even more important, it means they experience a sense of belonging and affirmation rather than one of isolation.

People describe PSD as feeling like a family. Students here are seen, known, and cared for. Teachers, school leaders, and staff are deeply dedicated to the school's mission and to the young people in their care. And they are inspired in their work by a sense of hopeful expectation. They know all students are capable of growing and achieving when they are guided, nurtured, and challenged. They know every individual has strengths and the ability to contribute to improving their community and the world.

In 2018, PSD purchased another 1-acre property – 156 West School House Lane – which is right next to our campus. This property has a non-descript building in poor condition, which if demolished, would allow PSD to make the campus safer by removing drive aisles from the center of campus. The building located on the property does not work for any of PSD's stated needs without a large financial investment. If PSD were to simply convert the building to office space, it would still be a financial investment, and PSD does not have a need for additional office space. PSD purchased the property with the intention to construct a new Student Activity Center, a building that will enhance the experience of PSD students in multiple ways. The property will also allow us to include new regulation athletic fields and enable PSD to connect the lower and upper schools. Our comprehensive campus plan places the new Student Activity Center strategically between the school's gymnasium and Early Childhood Center. This will create a bridge between the east side of campus, home to our youngest students, and the west side, where all the other major buildings are sited, allowing more frequent interaction between children of all ages. This placement will frame the playing field of the middle campus as a central quad, with pedestrian traffic flowing naturally around it. Vehicular traffic will be shifted away from the center of campus with the relocation of the school's parking lot, making circulation patterns much safer for our students.

The new building, a hub for curricular and extracurricular activity, will also house an auditorium and performance space, a dining commons and kitchen, and flexible common areas for gatherings of many kinds, both planned and informal. It is also envisioned to house a technology/media center, space for PSD's Transition Program, and supporting facilities such as an off-stage dressing area, a conference room, a faculty work room.

While designs for the building are still taking shape, the intent is clear. This will be a place of community, where students of all ages will come together and share meals together prepared in an appropriately equipped kitchen, and where events central to the life of the school can take place, from ASL Poetry and plays produced by our

excellent drama department to our graduation each spring. (Currently, performances, art shows, book fairs, and more take place in the gym, meaning that for weeks at a time, that facility is unavailable for its intended use; and graduation must be held at a site off-campus.)

The new building will also welcome members of the wider community to PSD and provide space for parents and family members to spend more time at the school. This is a critical goal as we seek to strengthen partnerships with parents as co-educators of their Deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

Because the experience of community is so essential to our students and their growing sense of self, this facility is even more important than it might at first seem—or than it might be on another campus. To witness young children transfixed as they watch high schoolers perform in a work of Deaf theater is to have a sense of the powerful connections this building will make possible every day.

The Student Activity Center will be designed following Deaf Space guidelines and best practices. For instance, interior spaces and walkways will be scaled to allow plenty of room between people for signing, and lines of sight will be carefully planned and maximized with ample use of glass and lighting that enhances visual-gestural communication. The building will also be equipped with the latest in adaptive technology to make performances and events optimally accessible. This will be the first all-school building that PSD will have the chance to design and build rather than inherit, and we intend to make the most of this opportunity.

With this, we are seeking your support in writing a letter or provide a testimony for the demolition of the building sitting on that one-acre property as “demolition necessary in the public interest” and a “financial hardship” to PSD. For PSD to provide students with a safe campus and regulation athletic fields, similar to peer schools, PSD should be allowed to demolish this building.

Our plans are ambitious, but with good reason. We are absolutely committed to our students’ wellbeing and success—and to creating the campus environment needed for both. We ask you to join us in making this important and exciting venture a resounding success. As teachers and students know, and as a team of planning consultants confirmed through a comprehensive study of the campus, certain features in terms of facilities are creating limitations in the opportunities available to students. The new Student Activity Center we plan to construct will address the most significant of these.

Your support will also allow Pennsylvania School for the Deaf to move forward with plans that will have a positive impact on the experience of our students for many years to come. Together, we are writing the first major chapter in the story of our school’s third century, and we are making a bold statement regarding the school’s aspirations and determination, too.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jodi Falk

Executive Director

St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf

SoLo/Germantown Civic Association (RCO)

Southwest Central Lower Germantown

CLEAN GREEN SAFE

Wayne Ave Merchant Association (WAM)

Registered Community Organization (RCO)

A Weiss BC Organizer 215 843 5555 awfromhh4@gmail.com

August 19, 2022

Philadelphia Historical Commission

1515 Arch St.

Phila., PA 191

Attn: Jon Farnham, Executive Director Jon.Farnham@phila.gov

Re: Against Hardship/Demolition 156 School House Lane

Dear Dr. Jon Farnham:

We fully supported the nomination of 156 W School House Lane, submitted by Penn Knox Neighborhood Assoc. January 24, 2019. At the time it was owned by Teen Challenge. We followed and participated in the process until it was accepted to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places March 12, 2021. We now oppose its demolition.

Boxwood as it is also known, built 1897, has been a landmark on School House Lane for generations. It is important to our historic community. A striking example of an artistic colonial home by Philadelphia/Germantown architect Mantle Fielding. For well over 100 years it has stood in its prominent location on a well traveled road, one of the oldest in our community of Germantown.

The property was purchased July 18, 2019. The owner well aware of the significance and condition. They were aware of the nomination and its responsibilities. There was no objection. It is our understanding there were other buyers interested in this property at the time. The current owner must provide the stewardship they understood at the time of purchase. They/we must ensure this property is preserved or find another who will. We find evidenced by recent sales there are many buyers interested in historic properties. This must be explored.

We have the opportunity now to ensure this building is protected and remains intact for future generations. Once it is gone it is gone. Let's not let this happen adjacent to 100-52 W School House Ln Germantown Academy, Main Building and Headmasters' Houses 1760 on the register 6/26/1956 and across from 107 W School House Ln James Matthew House on the register 8/7/1980. This block is important highly visible and is mostly an intact wonderful historic old street known as W Schoolhouse Lane.

156 School House Lane/Boxwood deserves the protection accorded to properties listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. It does not warrant demolition while there may be a buyer.

Thank you.

Sincerely

Allison Weiss/Pam Bracey

BC/Organizers

cc: preservation <preservation@phila.gov>, Kim Chantry <Kim.Chantry@phila.gov>, Laura.dipasquale laura.dipasquale@phila.gov, Shannon Garrison <Shannon.Garrison@phila.gov>, Meredith Keller meredith.keller@phila.gov, Allyson Mehley allyson.mehley@phila.gov, Megan Schmitt megan.schmitt@phila.gov

156 W Schoolhouse Lane

Lindsay Stolkey <lindsay.stolkey@gmail.com>

Sun 8/21/2022 9:53 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Hello, I'm a Germantown community member and have learned that a demolition is being attempted on another of our historic properties. I understand that the property was designated historic and the owner of the property knew this at the time they acquired the property. Too many historically, culturally, and architecturally significant homes are being destroyed. Please don't let this happen to one more. This building can be saved. It is a sad sad waste not to do so.

Thank you for your consideration of this.

Lindsay Stolkey



August 8, 2022

I am writing to provide my unequivocal support of Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD) in its request to proceed with the demolition of the building on their campus, located at 156 West School House Lane, for the intentions of building an accessible and equitable Student Activity Center for their entire campus body.

PSD has been successful for more than 200 years in creating a welcoming environment for all. The Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham, Massachusetts, shares PSD's vision to be a leader in Deaf education and advocacy. The broader Deaf and hard of hearing community has long fought, and continues to fight, for equitable education, access to information and a culture of acceptance, rather than navigating a world of isolation and discrimination.

In a nation that spans nearly four million square miles, there are so few places where deaf youth can freely be themselves – immersed in a language- and culture-rich environment. Schools like PSD are essential, and the opportunity to continue its growth for student enrichment, including its carefully proposed Student Activity Center, are fully in the best interest of not just the school, but of the public's interest.

With many buildings and architectural nods to Pennsylvania's rich history on its campus, PSD has clearly demonstrated their appreciation and dedication to preserving its historical presence, while expanding opportunities for students from Pre-K through Grade 12. The proposed Student Activity Center will be a place of community, where students of all ages will come together, and where events central to the life of the school can take place. This bridge between all ages and diversities is critical to the academic, emotional and behavioral growth of our youth. To provide students with a safe campus space, similar to peer schools, PSD should be allowed to demolish the proposed building on West School House Lane.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah Glenn-Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

Sarah Glenn-Smith, MBA, PhD
Chief Executive Officer
The Learning Center for the Deaf

don't demolish 156 W School House Lane!

Benno Groeneveld <b138233@yahoo.com>

Mon 8/22/2022 10:33 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Why demolish a building to make room for more parking and a driveway? Never heard of the song: Paved paradise, put up a parking lot? (Or am I dating myself?)

A building like that should be restored and re-purposed, not torn down!

Bernard (Benno) Groeneveld

141 West School House Lane
Philadelphia, PA 19144

Home/office phone: (215) 844-2764

Cell phone: (828) 279-7235

156 W. School House Lane

Georgette Bartell <geobartell@gmail.com>

Mon 8/22/2022 11:09 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Cc: Georgette Bartell <geobartell@gmail.com>; Irwin Trauss <itrauss@philalegal.org>

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To the Architectural Committee and the Hardship Committee

156 W. School House Land is a historically designated property owned by the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is in danger of being demolished. I oppose this action because:

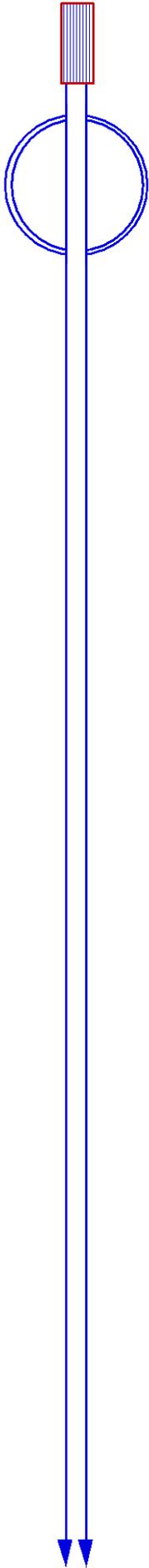
- The proposed "need" for the site of the house could be argued.
- PSD claims that they have been providing excellent service for their students for 35 years.
- They have already expanded their footprint with the buildings they demolished and with planning they can look into having an auditorium and a 4 story parking garage.
- They knew when they bought the property that historic designation was coming. They therefore knew that there would be opposition to destroying the house. This hurts their standing with the neighbors.
- Why did they get continuance after continuance before historic designation? Were they stalling to allow the building to deteriorate?
- They could sell the house to fund the parking garage and auditorium.
- They keep the property in fine condition for their students, parents and donors. As neighbors we also reap this benefit. As for their reputation amongst the neighbors, demolition would be a serious blow to their integrity.
- As I have mentioned in a previous meeting, historians and preservationists think in the long term. For generations to come, this house will represent a way of life that will never be seen again, hence is an important and imposing part in Germantown's history. When PSD thinks in the long term, even only 50 years, they may see a gradual reduction in enrollment. Will they find that their current situation is more than adequate? Destroying this house for an unknown future need seems to me short sighted. Genetic hearing loss (GHL) accounts for approximately 50% of those with hearing loss. As we all know, gene editing is a useful and rapidly growing field and it is being studied to intervene in this cause of deafness. It states in conclusion:

"the prospects of translating the successes with animal models to the clinical treatment of GHL become more feasible. We are approaching the day when patients with GHL can be treated and listen to "the Ode to Joy" led by gene therapy."

Ding, N, et al., Advances in Genome Editing for Genetic Hearing Loss. *Advanced Drug Delivery Reviews*, 168 (2021). 118-133.

This is not meant to be disrespectful to people with hearing loss. I admire PSD's role in education. I mainly want to look at this objectively with the future in mind and the goal of historic preservation.

Georgette Bartell
215.287.1016



Reinhart W. Struzyna R.A.
6611 Wissahickon Avenue.
Philadelphia, Penna. 19119

August 22, 2022

Re: Hardship application for demolition of 156 W. School House Lane

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Penn-Knox community in opposition to the hardship application requesting the demolition of 156 School House Lane (a historically designated property) by the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD). I am part owner of the Fairfax Apartments on the corner of West School House Lane and Wayne Avenue – diagonally across from the subject property and am keenly aware of the value that the many historic properties on this block of School house Lane bring to the neighborhood.

In order to meet the standards of historic preservation, the applicant must prove that

- The demolition is necessary in the public interest and/or
- The building cannot be used for any purpose for which it is or may be reasonably adapted

In essence, the application pits the public interest in maintaining and enhancing the historic property for the benefit of the neighborhood versus the public interest in enhancing the educational experiences provided by PSD. In its application, PSD maintains that renovation of the subject property for reuse for any number of vaguely defined purposes would be too costly given its limited budget and that demolition is the only option for providing enhanced site utility for playgrounds, parking and traffic patterns that would improve safety and utility for its students.

While PSD has provided one estimate for renovation, it is not clear what function for the building is being contemplated and what the cost of new construction for similar space would be. These issues need to be clarified in order to make an assessment as to whether the building “cannot be used for any purpose for which it is or may reasonably be adapted.” PSD indicates that the most reasonable use would be for office space, which it says it does not need. It has failed, however, to consider whether its current office space may be adapted for more academically beneficial uses (or sold if off campus) if the subject property were to be repurposed as office space.

Also, in reviewing the proposed site plan A prepared by DRA, it is clear that the rear portion of the subject property could be used for parking to enhance the safety and utility of the campus while the original structure could be subdivided and sold to a third party to renovate as a single family home at much more reasonable cost than PSD’s estimate, should there be no financially reasonable use it can make of the house.

Until these avenues are explored, the claim of financial hardship cannot be accepted because the standards for allowing demolition have not been met. The value of this historically designated property to the public interest of the neighborhood is too great to allow vague claims of financial hardship to prevail.

Sincerely,

Reinhart Struzyna

Boxwood - 156 W. School House Lane Financial Hardship demolition - architectural committee Aug 23, 2022; Hardship committee August 25, 2022.

irwin trauss.com <irwin@trauss.com>

Mon 8/22/2022 11:57 AM

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

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Dear Mr. Farnham:

Please include the following comments in opposition to the application of the Pennsylvania School or the Deaf for a permit to demolish the above referenced property which has been designated as historic based on a purported "hardship." These comments are being somewhat horribly prepared because I have only recently learned of the hardship application, thought the Penn Knox Neighbors have been proponents of preserving the property for over three years. I write for my self as the resident of the property directly cross the street from 156 W. School House Lane and on behalf of PKNA. I was the co-chair of PKNA when we encouraged PSD to relocate to our community in 1983 and 1984, at a time when the leadership of the organization actually had a commitment to maintaining and being the stewards of the historic site that they moved to.

Please note, the information in the application to demolish the building that remains on the property is somewhat out of date. Since PSD bought 156 all the all the buildings on the property , other than the main house, have been demolished. PDS is currently using about ½ of the property behind the main house to park school busses. Beyond that the property is just a field. I am sending you under separate cover some current pictures of the property including the main building.

I am also sending a pictures is of the 8 ½ " by x 11" notice of the demolition application that is posted on a part of the fence on the far right side of the property, far from the entrance gate on which the no trespassing signs and other notices are prominently posted. This notice seems insufficient and seems to have been posted in manner that was designed to hide PSD's application to destroy the property.

It is, I believe, noteworthy that PSD claims it needs a regulation size soccer field. This is noteworthy, because PSD had a full size soccer field which it reduced in size may years ago to create additional parking. This was long before PSD bought 156 and was done in violation of an agreement PSD entered into with Penn Knox Neighborhood Association when they first occupied the site to maintain the field and the open space and to not create additional parking spaces at the expense of the open space. Also, as a result of the removal of the buildings behind the main house. PDS now has enough room, it appears to re-create, a full size soccer field and to have additional parking without removing the historic structure on 156. It is significant that PSD did not view a regulation soccer field as central to its mission in the past, but felt additional parking trumped the need for a field.

As reflected in the application for demolition, the nomination for historic designation had been submitted before PSD purchased the property. PSD was aware of the application and I believe there is evidence PSD led the leadership of Penn Knox at the time to believe that PSD was supportive of the community's desire to preserve the historic main building.

Re adaptive reuse of the property, the party that had entered into an agreement of sale to purchase the property from Teen Challenge prior to PSD purchasing the property had plans to maintain and restore the main house and to convert it into four or five residential units. PKNA had no quibble with that. We opposed the project, because the developer also wanted to build in the neighborhood of 50 units behind the main building, which we believed

was too dense a project. In contrast, PSD, I believe led the leaders of PKNA to believe its interest in 156 was mostly in the lot behind the main house. There was also a group of neighbors who were preparing to create an entity to purchase the property to restore it for residential use, when it was sold without advertisement to PSD and without opportunity for the concerned neighbors to submit a bid.

The approx. \$3.5 million PSD says it will take to restore the property for any purpose, seems to be a meaningless number given that it is provided in a vacuum. PSD provides no figure for what it will cost to demolish the building and to build new. Similarly, they say that they could not incorporate the building into a new larger dining hall without building an addition, but PSD gives no figures for what it would cost to do so as compared to the cost of demolition and building an entirely new structure. Also, in their cost comparison, PSD do not take into account at all the environmental benefits, including the reduced carbon footprint of reuse of the existing building compared to demolition and building new – with materials that will likely not last as long as those that are already there.

PSD refused to give PKNA access to the building to have engineers hired by PKNA assess what it would cost to stabilize the building. The Commission should have its own engineers examine the building because PSD's figures seem questionable.

PSD has not really explained why the building cannot be retrofitted for classes. The spaces in the main building are likely more conducive to such reuse than where the spaces in the four historic buildings which PSD preserved and reused when they first moved to the property. At bottom, it seems PSD just don't feel like being saddled with another historic structure, which of course raises the question of why they bought a building that was slated for historic designation and which they knew they were prohibited from demolishing. In 1984 PSD spent over \$7 million dollars, about \$20,000,000.00 in today's dollars to reuse the existing historic properties. It was consistent with PSD's mission then, they have provided with no explanation as to why it is not part of their mission to spent proportionately the same amount of funds now, or why the funding would not be available to do so.

PSD's claim that they need the additional space to provide an adequate education for their students rings hollow given that they have been in the space without 156 for approximately 38 years, during which time they claim to have provided exemplary educations to the deaf and hearing impaired students in their charge. It is difficult to see how that status quo would be diminished if they sold the property, likely for a price that was higher than what they paid for it, to an entity that was willing to rehab, preserve and reuse the property in a manner consistent with the residential character of the neighborhood. At the very least they must be required to do so, if they can't come up with a plan for the adaptive reuse of the property.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I will be sending photos under separate cover.

Irwin
Irwin Trauss
165 W. School House Lane
Philadelphia. PA 19144
215 370 1969
215 438 6210 (land line)
215 848 8255 (fax)

From: Oscar Beisert <oscar.beisert@gmail.com>

Date: Sunday, August 21, 2022 at 6:36 PM

To: Georgette Bartell <geobartell@gmail.com>, "irwin@trauss.com" <irwin@trauss.com>, Margaret Manzer <margaretmanzer@gmail.com>, Sue Patterson <suepatterson1@gmail.com>

Cc: Alison Weiss <awfromhh5@gmail.com>, "J.M. Duffin" <jmduffin@comcast.net>, Aaron Wunsch <aaronwunsch@gmail.com>, Amy Lambert <lamma@design.upenn.edu>

Subject: Boxwood - Financial Hardship Application Information, Process and etc.

Hello all:

Attached please find everything I have on the Boxwood case, as well as links to the hardship application, the meeting agendas for next week, the original nomination form, the city's preservation ordinance, the PHC rules and regulations, etc. I have also included the specific sections of both the ordinance and rules and regs that discuss the hardship process. I have provided this to Conor Corcoran, a potential legal representative for our case, since he is being introduced to this process at the 11th hour. I am not sure who the lawyer will be but regardless it will be helpful to have all of this in one document. If anyone has additions to this document, please let me know--or simply make the additions and resend to the group. Please feel free to add others to the group, though a tactical approach would be appreciated.

We should probably have a strategy call tomorrow night if everyone is available. I will also create a very short version of this that we can use to solicit public support with a sample "email of opposition" to send to the commission via email.

Thanks again to Georgette and Irwin for their efforts to save this property, as well as PKNA.

Cheers,
Oscar

156 W. School House Lane - Continuance Request for 8/23, 8/25, and 9/9 meetings

Conor Corcoran <conor@jccesq.com>

Mon 8/22/2022 2:56 PM

To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>; Kim Chantry <Kim.Chantry@Phila.gov>; Laura Dipasquale <Laura.Dipasquale@Phila.gov>; Shannon Garrison <Shannon.Garrison@Phila.gov>; Meredith.Keller@Phila.gov <meredith.keller@phila.gov>; Allyson Mehley <Allyson.Mehley@Phila.gov>; meghan.schmitt@phila.gov <meghan.schmitt@phila.gov>; Leonard Reuter <Leonard.Reuter@Phila.gov>; preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>; mcclure@ballardspahr.com <mcclure@ballardspahr.com>

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Dear Mr. Farnham, PHC members, Mr. Reuter, and Mr. McClure:

Please be advised that this office represents the Penn Knox Neighborhood Association (PKNA), which has its objections to the pending application concerning 156 W. School House Lane, to be addressed during the above captioned meetings currently scheduled before the PHC and its subcommittees on 8/23, 8/25 and 9/9.

I am writing to request a continuance of all three hearings, for the following reasons.

As an initial matter, I am requesting the same because on August 9, 2022, I found my 77 year old father (with whom I practiced law) in a diabetic coma, and I am dealing with the repercussions concerning his care, as he lives alone.

Secondly, it is my understanding that the Pa. School for the Deaf, which owns the property at issue, is party to a long-standing contract, from 1983 or 1984, with the Phila. Redevelopment Authority (a prior owner of the property), which specifically requires the school to maintain historic properties under its aegis, at this location, explicitly for the PKNA as a third party beneficiary. I'd like the PHC to be fully edified about this contract if and when a copy of the same is procured from PKNA's records or, of course, if Mr. McClure is in possession of the same.

Finally, the pendency of this matter only came to the attention of the PKNA late on the evening on August 9, 2022, when the PKNA was notified by Oscar Beisert regarding its pendency. While it is my understanding that Mr. Farnham himself posted the public notice on the School's property, I do not know when that occurred, and in any event, it is my understanding that neither the school, nor Mr. McClure's office, nor the PHC directly contacted the PKNA concerning the pending application before the PHC.

As you can imagine, I will need time to review PKNA's files, among others, to properly prepare for PKNA's presentation before the PHC and its subcommittees. Accordingly, I would ask for the PHC's accommodations in these respects, subject to the availabilities of Mr. McClure's calendar, who is cc'd hereto.

Thank you for your prompt and gracious attention to this matter.

Sincerely Yours,
Conor Corcoran

**** PLEASE NOTE NEW ADDRESS AS OF 5/10/2022 ****

Law Office of J. Conor Corcoran, P.C.
2601 Pennsylvania Avenue
Suite 501
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19130

Tel. (215) 735-1135
Fax (215) 735-1175

<http://www.jccesq.com>

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