

Public comment received for the
nomination of 4740 Baltimore Avenue

Support for the nomination of 4740 Baltimore Ave

Patrick J. Bayer <patrickbayer1220@gmail.com>

Wed 5/22/2024 8:00 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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I am writing to express my strong support for the nomination of 4740 Baltimore Ave. I live in the neighborhood on Baltimore Avenue, and pass the church daily, admiring the incredible Tiffany windows. The church is an important neighborhood landmark that is both architecturally and historically significant; it deserves the highest level of protection available.

Thank you,
Patrick Bayer

My name is Richard Kirk. I am speaking only for myself, but full disclosure, I am a Trustee of Calvary United Methodist Church since 1994, and am the retiring Board President for the Calvary Center for Culture and Community, which I led to found and incorporate in 2000 for the sole purpose of preserving and repurposing the Calvary building which was at that time nearly in ruin and up for sale, with its stained glass being sold separately. I have notified everyone of my upcoming retirement next month after 30 years of working on saving this Calvary building. Also I have been a member of the University City Historical Society for 35 years, and my house in the neighborhood was featured in their historic house tours three different years.

After 52 years as a resident of this community, and after 41 years working to restore my own Victorian home in the neighborhood, as a community activist working to reinvigorate and revitalize the surrounding community for all those 40 years, and to the point here, working for 30 years to save the Calvary building and its treasures without any proper qualifications whatever and not being a billionaire, I don't have to defend my position about my support for historic preservation to anyone.

The Calvary Center was successful in filling the Calvary building with religious congregations, educational facilities, social justice groups, the performing arts, community groups, and much more, all non-profit groups, which has had a tremendous halo effect in development in the surrounding area, and has built community, succeeding beyond all expectations for over two decades. But over the past five years the CCCC was hit with a series of calamities which has left the Center in a financial crisis and its survival is in serious question.

It started in the winter of 2018-2019 with a catastrophic failure of the antiquated heating system, which for many reasons took us 6 years and \$350K to finally rectify. After the second heating failure the following winter, the pandemic set in which forced closure of the building for a year and a half, during which we collected almost no income and some of our nonprofit building user groups ceased to exist, and all of this caused the necessity of starting over with our plans to create a new governance for the center and the building, and has left us

hanging on by a thread and completely broke.

These simultaneous blows have used up all of our reserves, and all of our energy, too many of our building users evaporated or left, and have put Calvary Center into a real financial crisis, and it has become very difficult to see the way forward.

The University City Historical Society, through whose auspices I came to Calvary in the first place in 1994, was crucial in our ability to turn around what was at that time considered to be our community's cataclysmic lost cause at Calvary . The UCHS itself established their offices at Calvary as a symbol of their regard for the historic legacy and strategic importance of the Calvary building in revitalizing the surrounding corridor and preserving the astonishing but barely surviving Victorian physical plant surrounding Calvary. But over the years the Society greatly lowered its support of Calvary, as Calvary on the surface seemed to now be succeeding on its own, and in later years it contributed less, and less and then nothing to the effort. In 2022, their representative on the CCCC Board resigned and was not replaced, and then in 2023, the Society actually removed its offices from the Calvary building. The UCHS is well aware, or should be well aware of our financial situation and complete inability to comply with historic designation regulations, either financially or with adequate staff, and they knew that Calvary church was opposed to the nomination for those valid reasons, and yet refused to withdraw their nomination. Just before they submitted this nomination, I had asked UCHS for financial support in helping us finish raising the last \$20,000 of the \$210,000 needed to complete installations of the new HVAC systems, and they did put an appeal in their December newsletter, but the appeal resulted in only about \$1500 in donations, basically not even a drop in the bucket. We asked again this month for their board to attend a meeting to discuss this issue. Only two of the UCHS board members attended the meeting, and one of them, their board president, announced on leaving the meeting early a flat refusal to withdraw the nomination without even hearing any discussion about why Calvary could not support it. I have found the behavior of the Historical Society Board throughout this process to be incomprehensible, irresponsible, and choosing to ignore the reality on the ground concerning of our situation because they have to know what it is. One more comment about the approach taken by the UCHS board president,

Amy Lambert. She was raised in the Methodist church which she says was a very positive experience, she is an architect who really appreciates historic preservation. We desperately need an architect on our board. What if she had approached Calvary offering her services on our board for five or ten years, and agreeing to take on responsibility for helping raise significant finances for restorations, taking on all dealings and interactions with the Commission, that might well have had a very different effect on our decision. Think simple psychology, after all, most people are more convinced by positive offers of real assistance rather than by oppositional empty demands. Shame on her. How much does she really care about this if she won't put her money where her mouth is? People like her turn my stomach.

Interest and support of Calvary from the community at large seems to have waned in the same direction as UCHS over the years, again taking it for granted. But the local Baltimore Avenue businesses who supported us are now themselves struggling, and some failing, after the pandemic, and while increased gentrification has created a neighborhood much more professional and wealthy, the newcomers in general are not as focused on community bonding or historic preservation. The more well healed new influx of residents in University City seem less inclined to notice or care about historic preservation than the previous generation, and what they do to their vintage homes' interiors reflect this trend. This isn't something evil at all, it simply reflects changing values and priorities.

The bottom line is, Calvary is in a situation right now that our lack of financial means is so great that Calvary and the Center have no choice but to consider all options in order to salvage or restore whatever we can, however we can, at this point. To put it bluntly, through no fault of our own, we have found ourselves in a position that is completely untenable to be the stewards to meet the requirements of historic preservation or keep safe its important art treasures. In order to stay alive and operate in the community, rather than sell the whole package and move on, and with my imminent "retirement", the center absolutely must move to professional management in order to rebuild and to keep operations going, but the question hangs in the air as to where the finances for this kind of necessary

operation will come from. We are talking about \$100K annually that we just do not have.

But beyond the program operations and building management, and this is most important, we still need more than three and a half million dollars to restore the building itself into not even mint condition, but a condition that will allow us to operate under conditions that are beyond constant crisis control, so that management can concentrate on rebuilding the center and develop income streams to revitalize this important and still needed vibrant community anchor on Baltimore Avenue and center for the community and for the arts programs that it has become.

As for Calvary Church, its first concern is to its mission which is one of faith, and to build and bond this community, and to help those who need it. It is not that Calvary Church doesn't appreciate historic preservation, it has done that for some thirty years now and will do so as long as it is able, but sadly, the harsh reality is that we can only do what our meager resources will allow us to do. Calvary simply does not know where the money will come from to help us preserve this building or its works of art. We will have to do what we will have to do. Historic designation at this time will change nothing except that it will complicate matters even further and it will NOT help Calvary or the building or promote preservation.

My observations over recent years have led me to some personal introspection about what actually might be best for the giant Tiffany windows in particular. They themselves are in need of care and restoration. Second, we have all become aware of possible threats of violence at Calvary, a prime political target for many reasons, and the Tiffany windows in their positions right on the busy and heavily trafficked street corridors are completely vulnerable to physical attack as much as are the people inside the building. For that and other significant reasons, I wonder whether the windows wouldn't be physically safer, absolutely much better curated and cared for, and certainly more appreciated and admired in another place.

I want to make the situation perfectly clear. It is not the case that the building would be sold, or that the windows would be sold separately, if there were any

way that this could be avoided. Both the building and the windows are a real artistic asset in themselves even in this city that has an embarrassment of architectural and artistic treasures. But the “if” this could be avoided” is a \$3.5 million dollar “if”, and we don’t have that kind of money and we don’t know where that money will come from.

With all of this, how can the UCHS or the Historic Commission justifiably compel Calvary to comply with the regulations of the Historic Commission when you know full well that we simply cannot afford to do that? And how would historic designation be in the best interest of preservation when it could lead in the opposite direction, perhaps even to a horrific scenario of the building becoming abandoned, no sale possible because of the Commission’s restrictions on it, and at some point the building burns down or the priceless windows are vandalized or destroyed in a big storm or just collapse? In my mind this is completely antithetical to what this Commission or the University City Historical Society should even stand for. My understanding is that the Historic Commission and the University City Historical Society in forcing this historic designation would in no way imply that UCHS or the Commission would take on any responsibility of finding the means to properly restore the windows and the building to the point that it can serve the community without going from crisis to crisis to crisis. If that is the case, who do they think will take on that responsibility? I humbly suggest that this nomination be withdrawn or denied. Regardless, I believe that Calvary will still do its best to preserve the building, but we must have all our options when preservation is clearly no longer possible, and will do what is best to save what can be saved if it comes to that, but beyond that, Calvary can do no more, and historic designation may ironically be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. The Historic Commission must clearly understand what it means that Calvary cannot guarantee compliance because of our poor financial situation. You can’t will preservation into existence without the money to make it happen. This is not our fault, we are not being irresponsible here and that is why I am giving you this reality check. I’ll say it again, Calvary does not have the staff OR the funds to comply with historic designation oversight. It simply does not. It can not. Period. With designation YOU BOTH are creating additional problems that you will not solve and that is not acceptable.

You on the Historical Commission should consider yourselves obligated to understand and appreciate the inconvenient truth of Calvary's position of poverty and take it fully into account as you consider this application, which we have no choice but to oppose. The hard reality is, the real question we face is all about money. For all those who would push for historic preservation without rational and realistic consideration, my only question is the question we are all asking with respect to Calvary: Where will the money come from? And if you don't know the answer, well, I'm sorry, but I don't either and I have worked on this problem for 30 years and all of you have not. Perhaps there is a way you can really help here: If any of you exalted people on the Commission know of some gazillionaire out there that will help Calvary, by all means direct that gazillionaire to CCCC without delay. We will be forever grateful and you can get what you say you want for sure. I am personally forever grateful for every building of great beauty of our collective heritage that can be saved. But after 30 years, I have sadly come to realize that wishing doesn't make it so. Empty directives do not make it so. Only money makes it so. Thank you for your time.

Kim Chantry

From: Katherine Dowdell <kdowdell@farragutstreet.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 11, 2024 3:31 PM
To: preservation
Cc: Amy Lambert; Paul Steinke; Hanna Stark
Subject: Calvary Church 4740 Baltimore Avenue

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I am writing to express my strong support for the designation of Calvary United Methodist Church at 4740 Baltimore Avenue. This important neighborhood landmark is both architecturally and historically significant; it deserves the highest level of protection available.

Thank you - Kathy Dowdell