

ADDRESS: 1600-06 E BERKS ST

Proposal: Construct eight townhouses

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: Harry Siebert

Applicant: Thomas Keller, CANNObdesign

History: 1885; St. Laurentius Church; Edwin Forrest Durang, architect; demolished in 2022

Individual Designation: 7/10/2015

District Designation: None

Staff Contact: Jon Farnham, jon.farnham@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to construct eight three-story townhouses on a vacant lot in Fishtown. St. Laurentius Church, which was designated in 2015, stood on the site until 2022, when it was demolished. The church was vacant at the time of designation and the property owner, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, claimed that it was in such poor condition that repair was infeasible. After designation, a developer placed the church property under contract and designed an adaptive reuse plan, but a community group obstructed the project and eventually thwarted the plan to reuse the historic church. In 2020, the Archdiocese sold the property to a second developer, who applied to the Historical Commission to demolish the church, claiming that the towers were structurally unstable and posed a public safety hazard. The Department of Licenses and Inspections agreed with the structural assessment and requested that the Historical Commission review the application on an emergency basis. The Historical Commission reviewed the application in July and August 2020 and approved some demolition of the historic church to abate the unsafe conditions but required the property owner to either retain part of the front façade or salvage elements of the front façade for incorporation into new construction at the site. The Historical Commission approved the demolition with the following conditions:

- The demolition is limited to the two towers above the watertable and other sections of the building as needed for the safe staging and demolition of the towers, with the limits of demolition to be determined by the Department of Licenses and Inspections.
 - Sections of the building that can safely stand after the demolition of the towers must be left in place.
- The façade along Berks Street up to the projected gable line is protected during demolition or reconstructed in kind within 24 months of the completion of demolition. If the façade is to be demolished:
 - Unique materials and features of the Berks Street façade including but not limited to columns, windows and doors, window and door surrounds, sills and lintels, and steps must be salvaged or replicated in kind for use in the reconstruction.
 - The Berks Street façade must be laser scanned prior to demolition and a copy of the scan provided to the Historical Commission.

The owner of the property demolished the church in its entirety and apparently did not preserve any materials or features from the front façade. In March 2025, the developer at the time of the demolition sold the property to a new developer, the current applicant.

The application proposes to construct eight three-story townhouses, four facing E. Berks Street and four facing E. Wilt Street. Side facades would face Memphis Street. The townhouses would include pilot houses and roof decks. They would be clad in brick veneer and have large, industrial-looking windows and projecting metal entry stairs on the front facades and smaller windows on the side facades. The westernmost townhouse on E. Wilt Street would be larger than the rest and include arched windows.

SCOPE OF WORK:

- Construct eight three-story townhouses

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW:

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines do not apply because no historic resources survive at the site and the surrounding neighborhood is not designated as historic. There is no basis for judging the compatibility of the proposed new construction with a designated historic resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends denial because the application does not account for the conditions that the Historical Commission placed on the demolition in 2020.

The minutes documenting the review of the demolition application in July and August 2020 are included below for reference.

1600 BERKS ST

ZONING TO BE SUBMITTED
(8) SINGLE FAMILY TOWNHOMES
(1-2) CAR PARKING PER HOME
SHARED DRIVE AISLE
PRIVATE ROOF DECKS



CANNOdesign

APRIL 7TH, 2025





BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
SITE - PREVIOUS CATHEDRAL UNDER DEMOLITION | BERKS & MEMPHIS

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APRIL 7TH, 2025





BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
SITE - PREVIOUS CATHEDRAL UNDER DEMOLITION | BERKS & MEMPHIS

CANNOdesign
APRIL 7TH, 2025



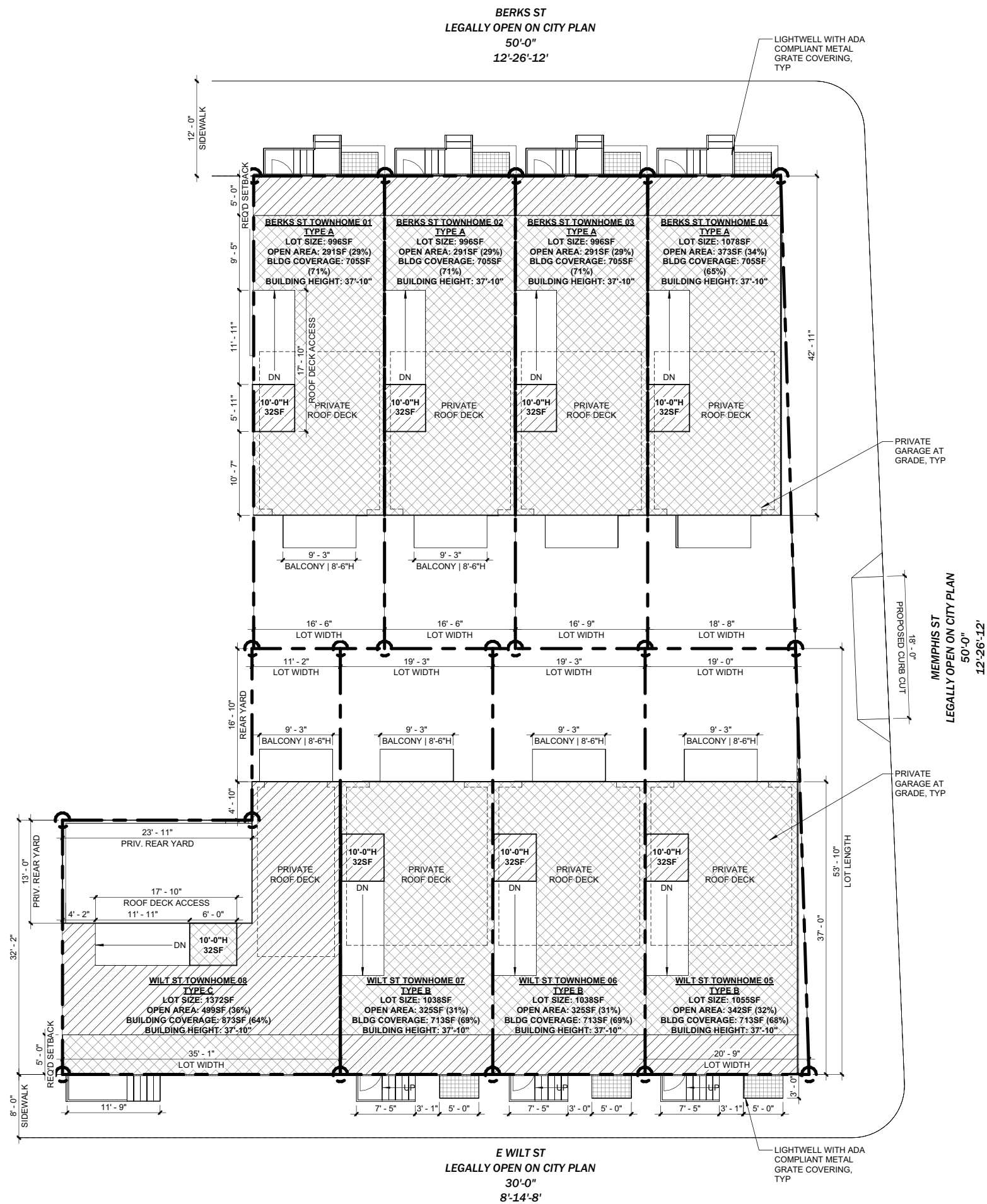
BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
SITE - PRESENT DAY | BERKS & MEMPHIS

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APRIL 7TH, 2025

BERKS ST TOWNHOMES

PROPOSED SITE PLAN

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The floor plan shows a rectangular building divided into four units. Each unit has a garage on the ground floor and a living area with stairs leading up to a second floor. The building is oriented with E Wilt St to the south. The plan includes dimensions for the overall footprint and individual units, as well as a proposed curb cut on the right side.

Overall Dimensions:

- Overall Width: 30'-0"
- Overall Depth: 8'-14'-8"

Unit Dimensions (Ground Floor):

- Unit 1 (Top Left): 15'-2" x 15'-2"
- Unit 2 (Top Middle): 15'-2" x 15'-2"
- Unit 3 (Top Right): 15'-2" x 14'-11"
- Unit 4 (Bottom Left): 9'-9" x 17'-7"
- Unit 5 (Bottom Middle): 17'-8" x 17'-8"
- Unit 6 (Bottom Right): 17'-8" x 17'-8"

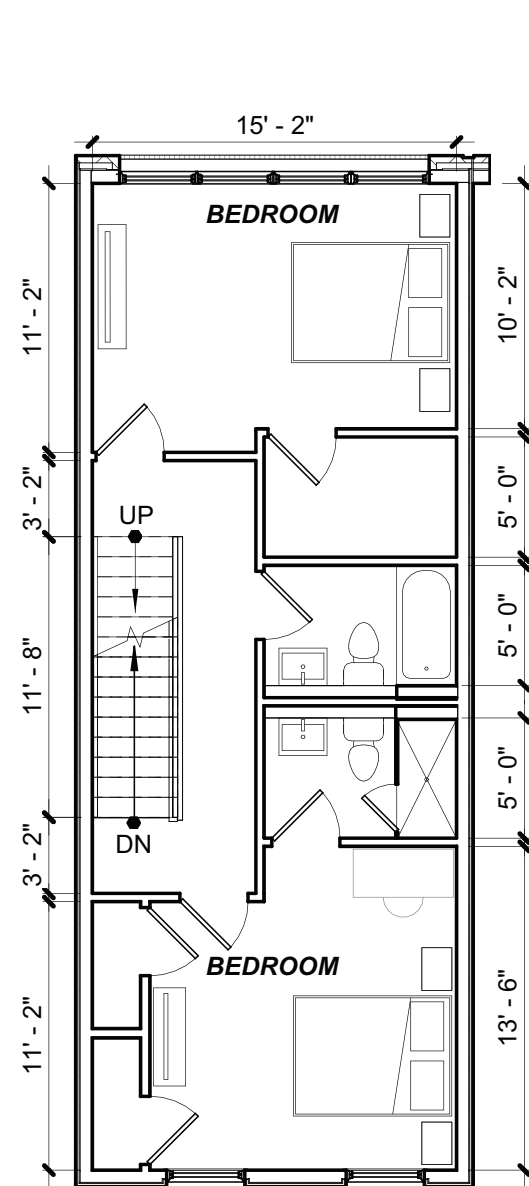
Proposed Curb Cut:

- Width: 18'-0"
- Depth: 12'-26'-12"

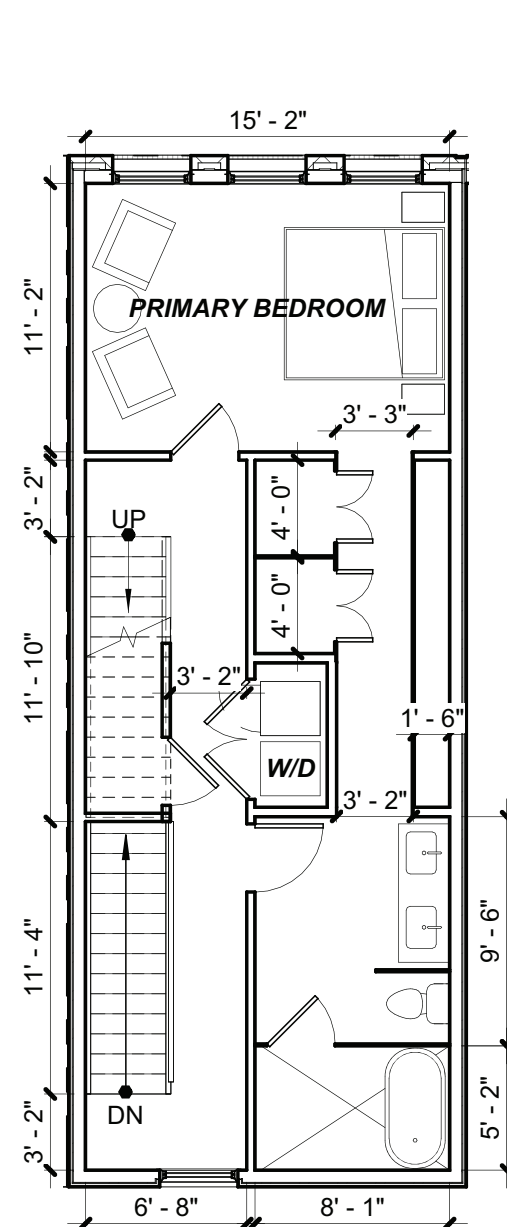
Other Features:

- Stairs: Indicated by arrows and 'UP' labels.
- Garage: Labeled in each of the six units.
- Living Area: Indicated by furniture outlines and stairs.

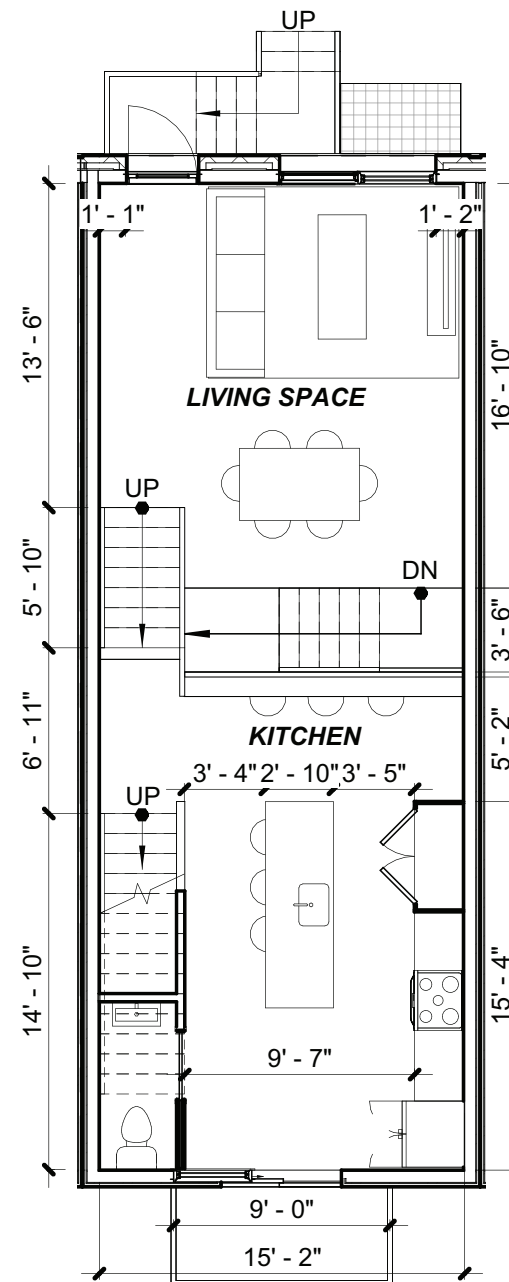
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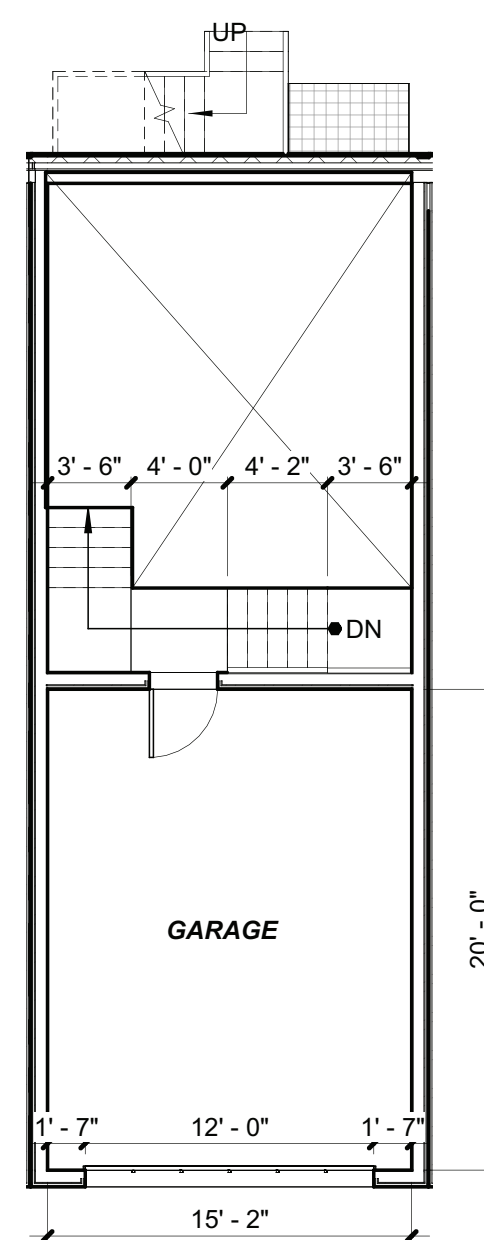
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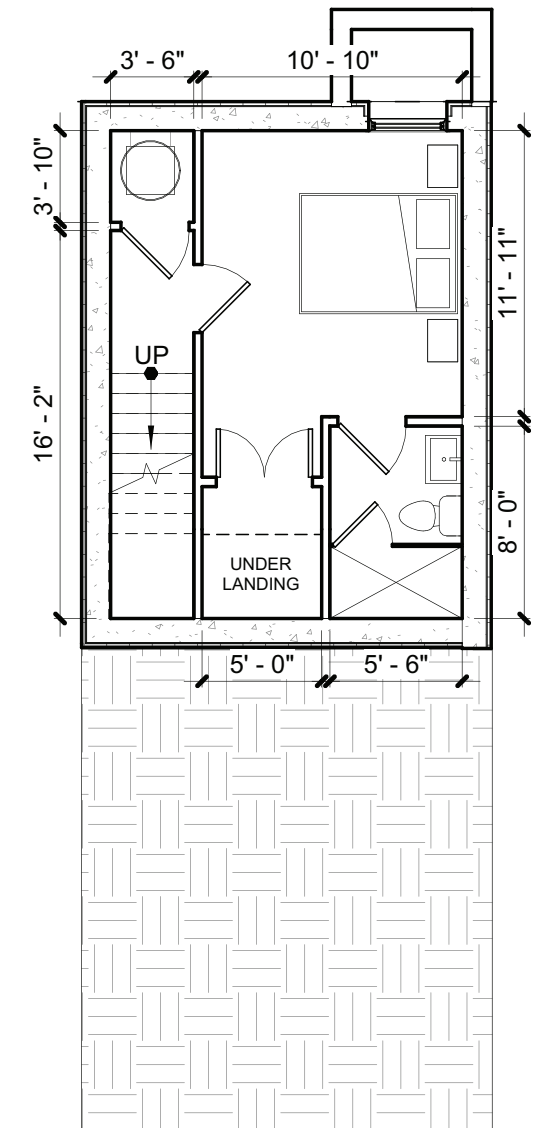
SECOND FLOOR



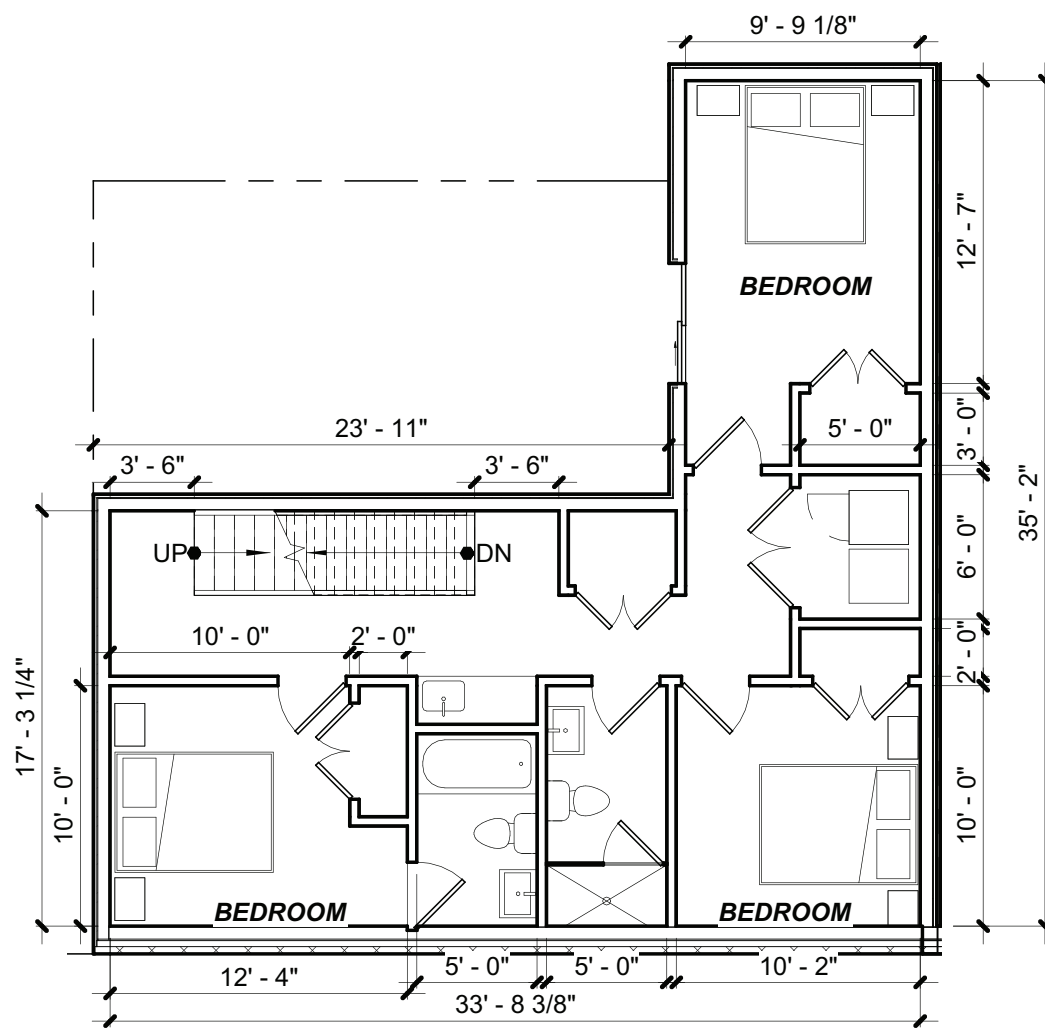
FIRST FLOOR



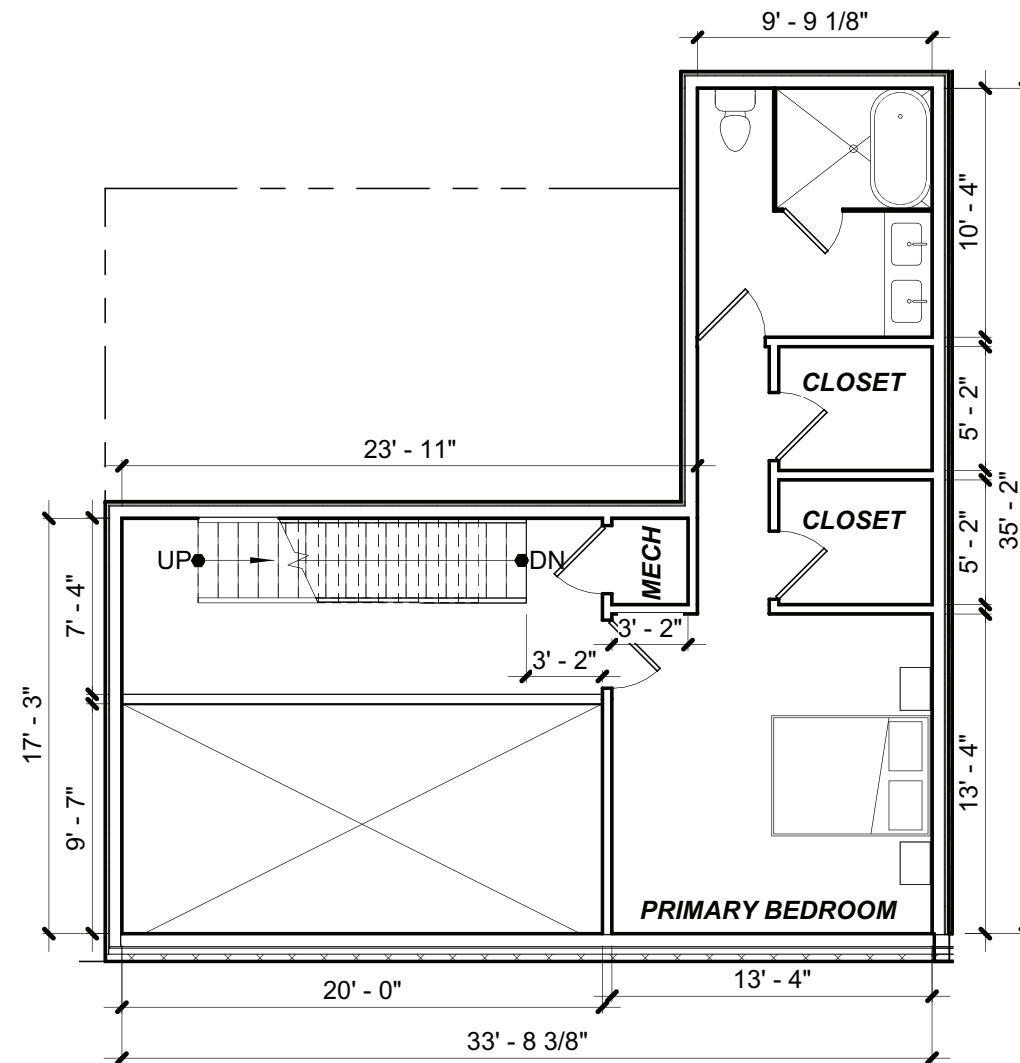
GRADE/GARAGE



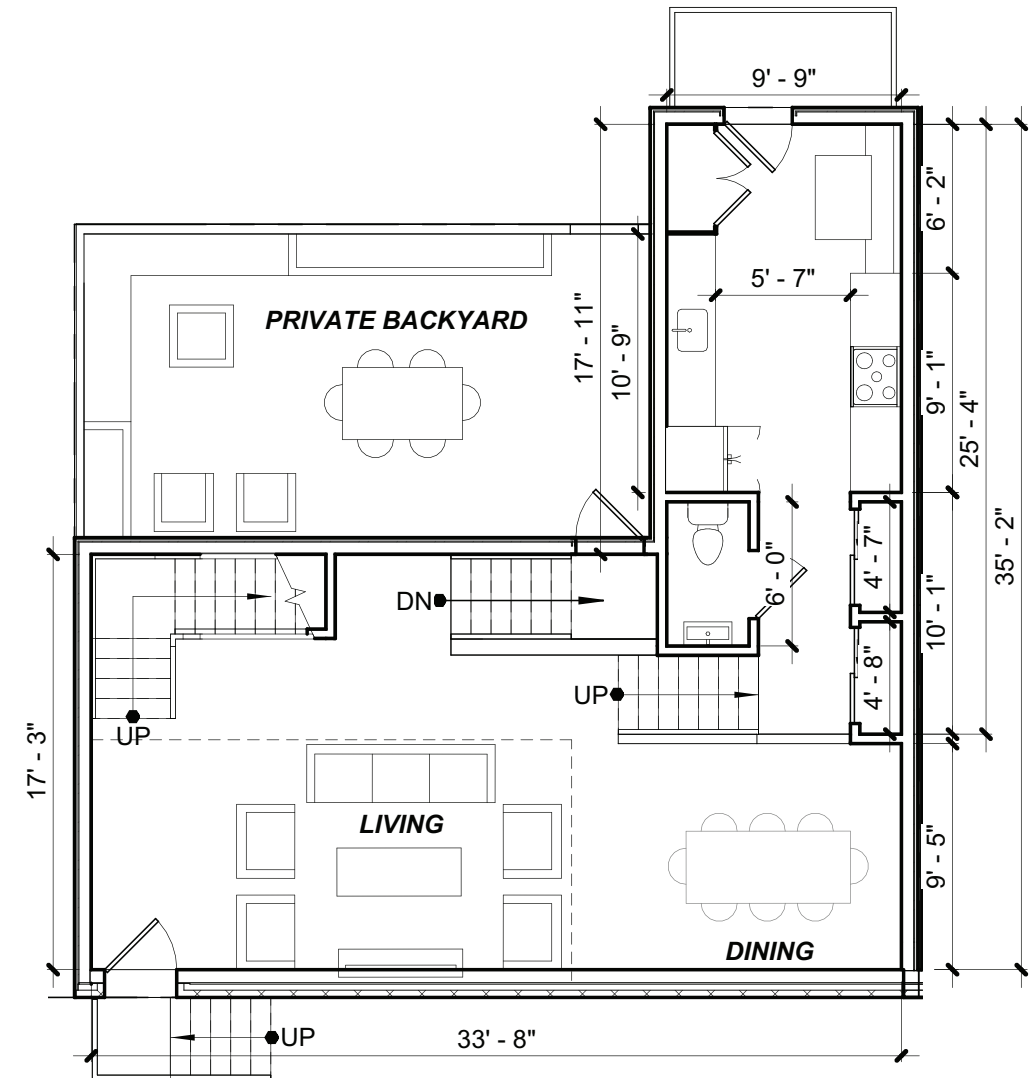
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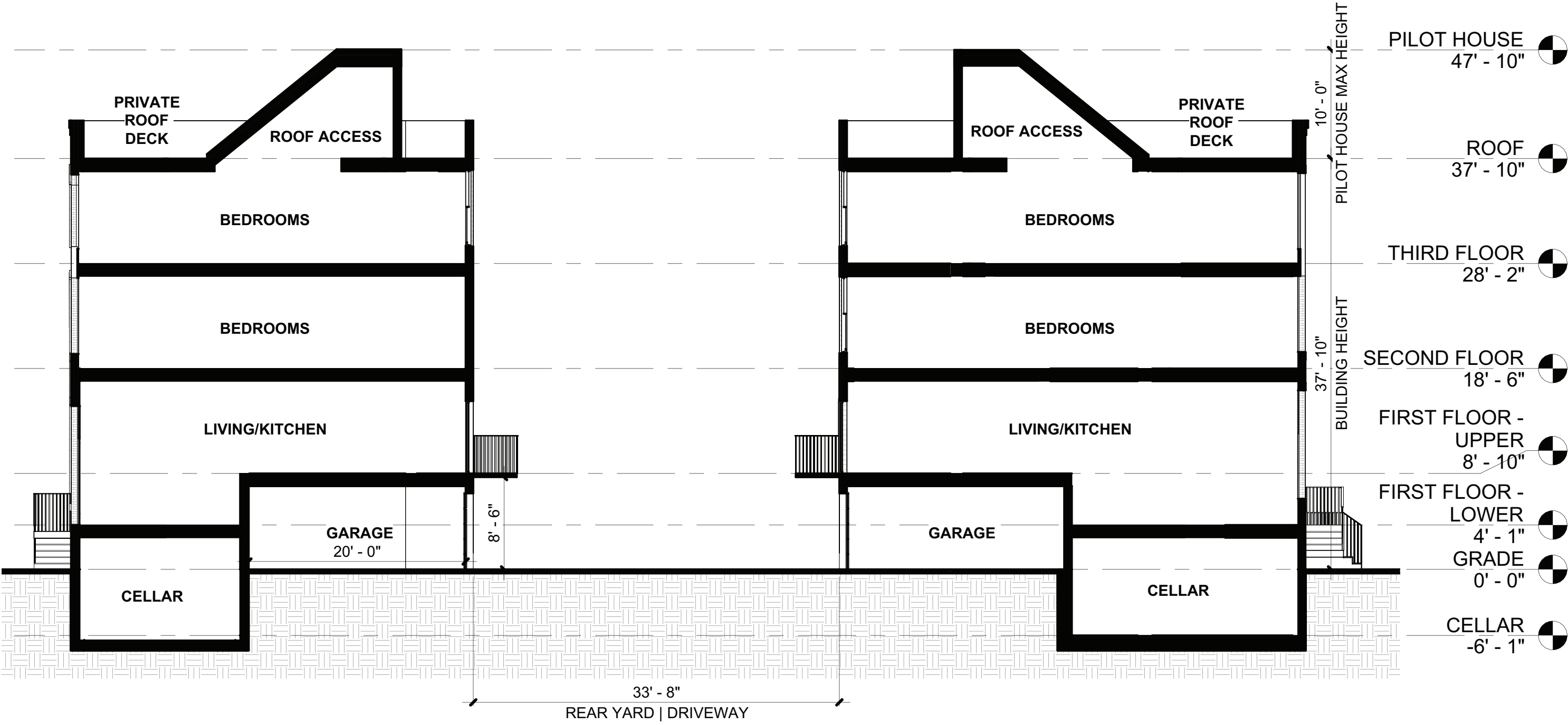
THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



BERKS ST TOWNHOMES

1600 E BERKS ST, PHILADELPHIA PA

OWNER

HENRY SIEBERT
2929 WALNUT ST #418
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19104
TEL: 310-739-7870

ARCHITECT

CANNO DESIGN
109 S 13TH STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107
TEL: (215) 977-7075

CIVIL ENGINEER

AQUA ENGINEERING
1391 WALTON ROAD
BLUE BELL, PA 19422
TEL: (267) 885-9875

LOT SUBDIVISION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION OF (8)
TOWNHOMES WITH PRIVATE ROOF DECKS AND GARAGES

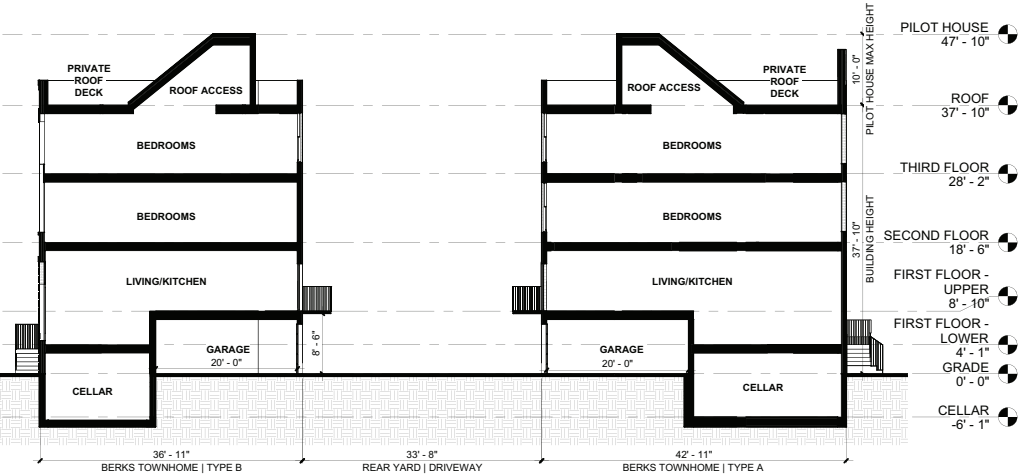
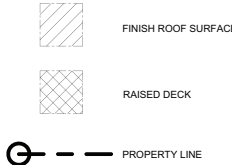
03/XX/2025

ZONING & LOCATION MAP

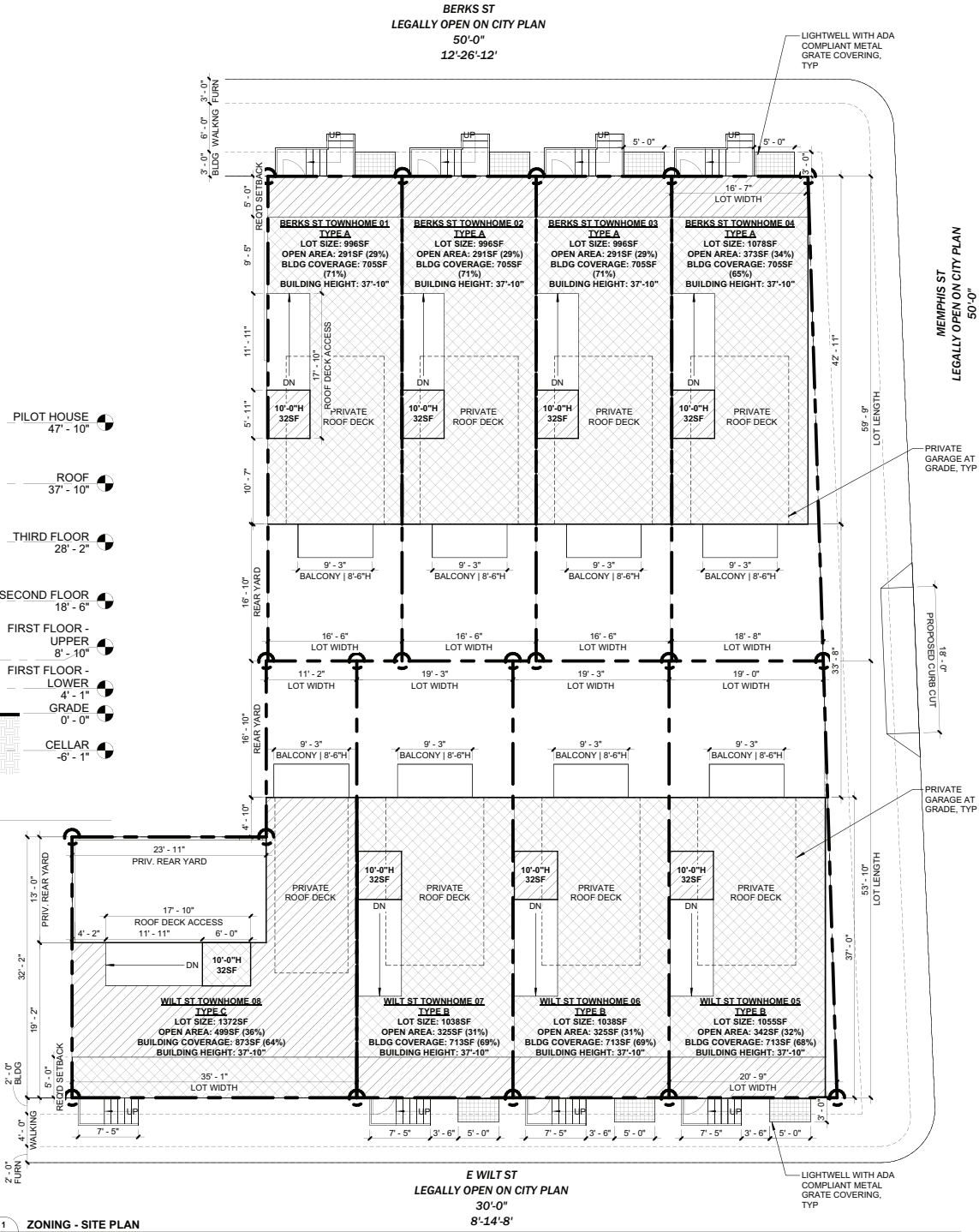


ZONING SUMMARY				
		RSA-5	PROPOSED	CONFORMING/ NON-CONFORMING
LOT WIDTH	FT	16' MIN	SEE SITE PLAN	CONFORMING
LOT AREA	SF	800 SF MIN	SEE SITE PLAN	CONFORMING
OCCUPIED AREA	%	75% MAX	SEE SITE PLAN	CONFORMING
OPEN AREA	%	25% MIN	SEE SITE PLAN	CONFORMING
FRONT YARD SETBACK	FT	N/A	N/A	CONFORMING
SIDE YARD(S) SETBACK	FT	N/A	N/A	CONFORMING
REAR YARD SETBACK	FT	9' MIN	16'-10"	CONFORMING
BUILDING HEIGHT	FT	38'-0"	37'-10"	CONFORMING
PARKING	#	0	1	CONFORMING
BIKE PARKING	#	0	0	CONFORMING
RESIDENTIAL UNITS	#	1	1	CONFORMING

SYMBOL LEGEND



2 ZONING SECTION - TOWNHOME TYPES A & B
3/32" = 1'-0"



1 ZONING - SITE PLAN
1/8" = 1'-0"

VERSIONDATE

No:SUBMISSION/REVISIONDATE

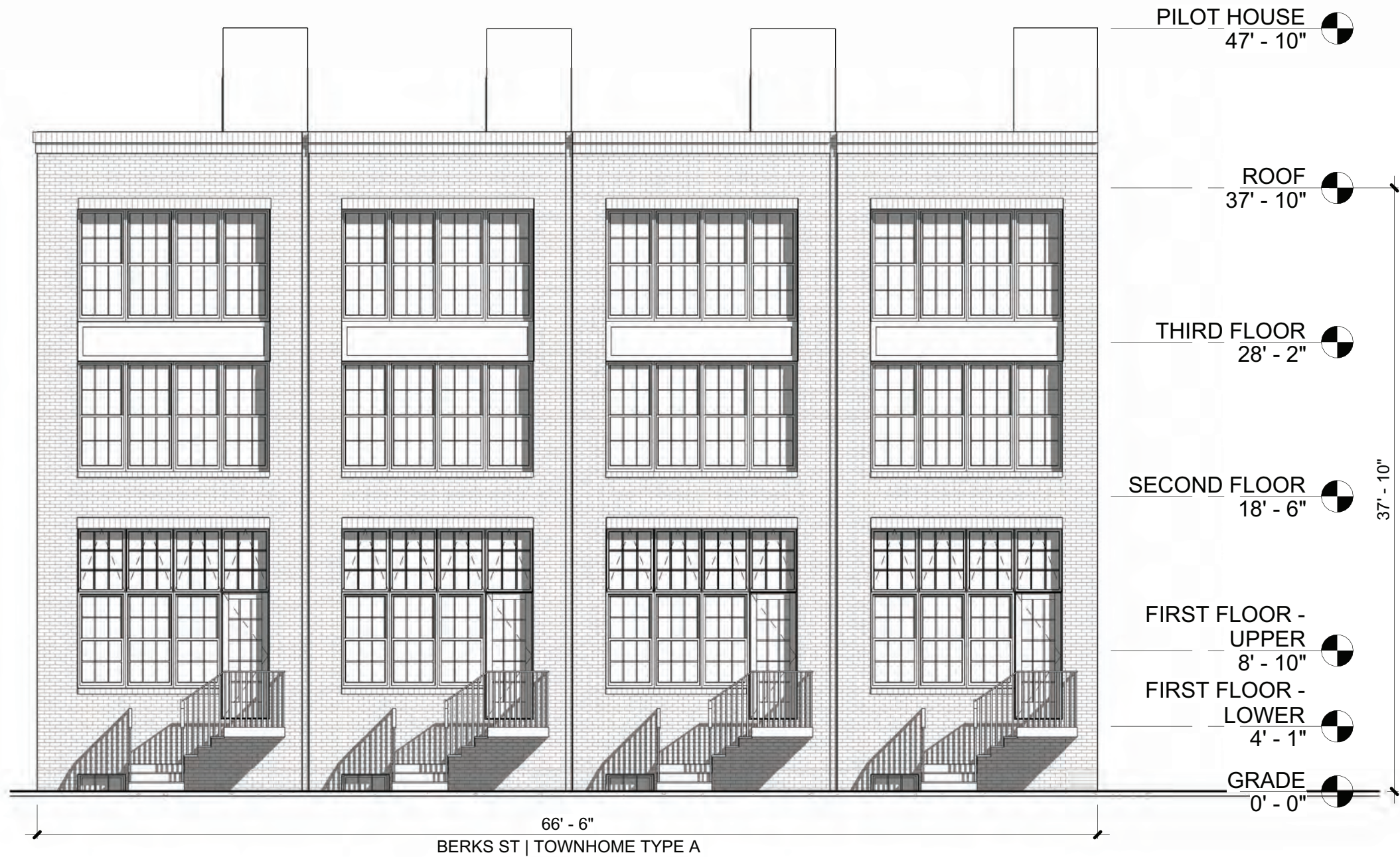
BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
1600 E BERKS ST, PHILADELPHIA

CANNO design
109 S. 13TH STREET, 2ND FLOOR
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107

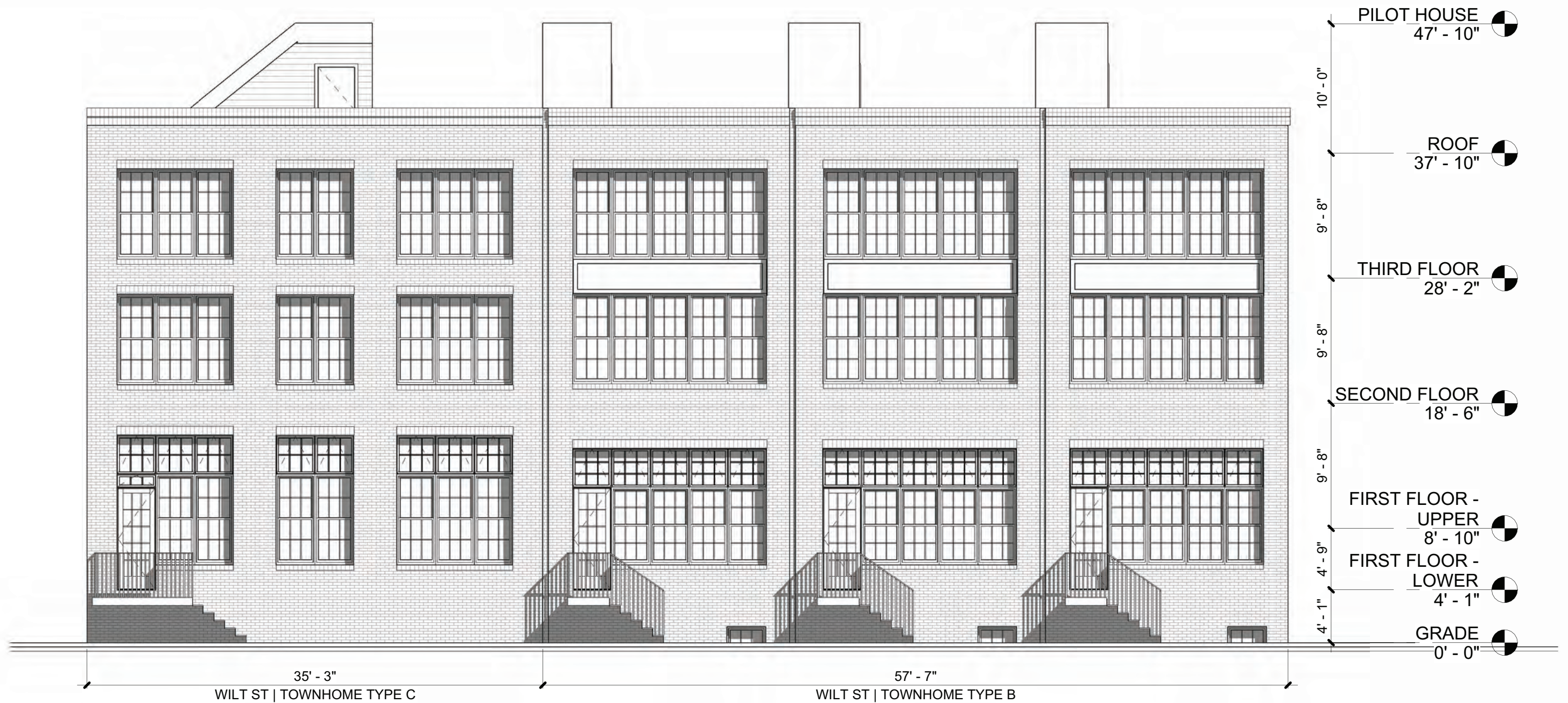
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ZONING DRAWING

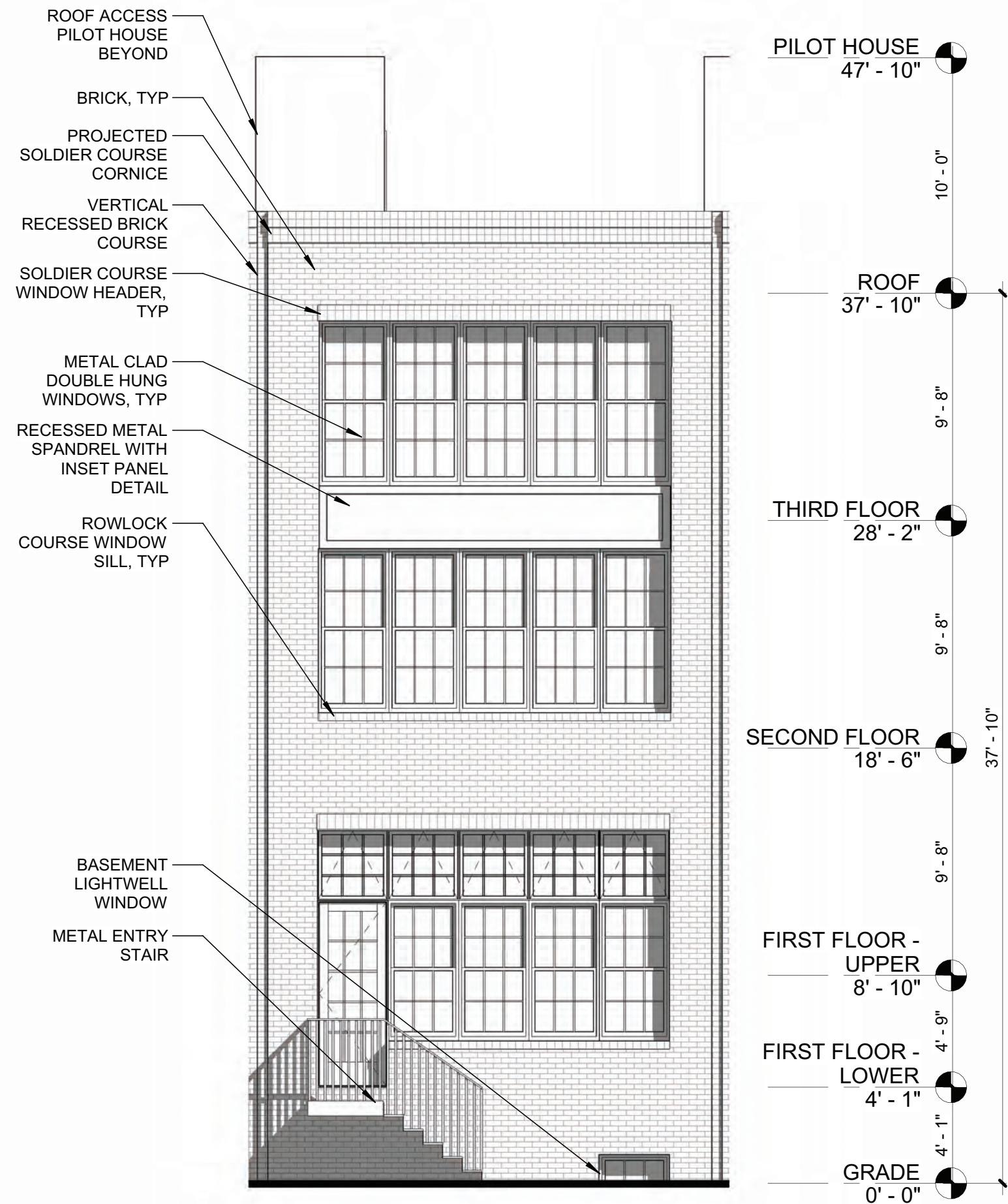
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Checked By:CJY
Scale:As indicated

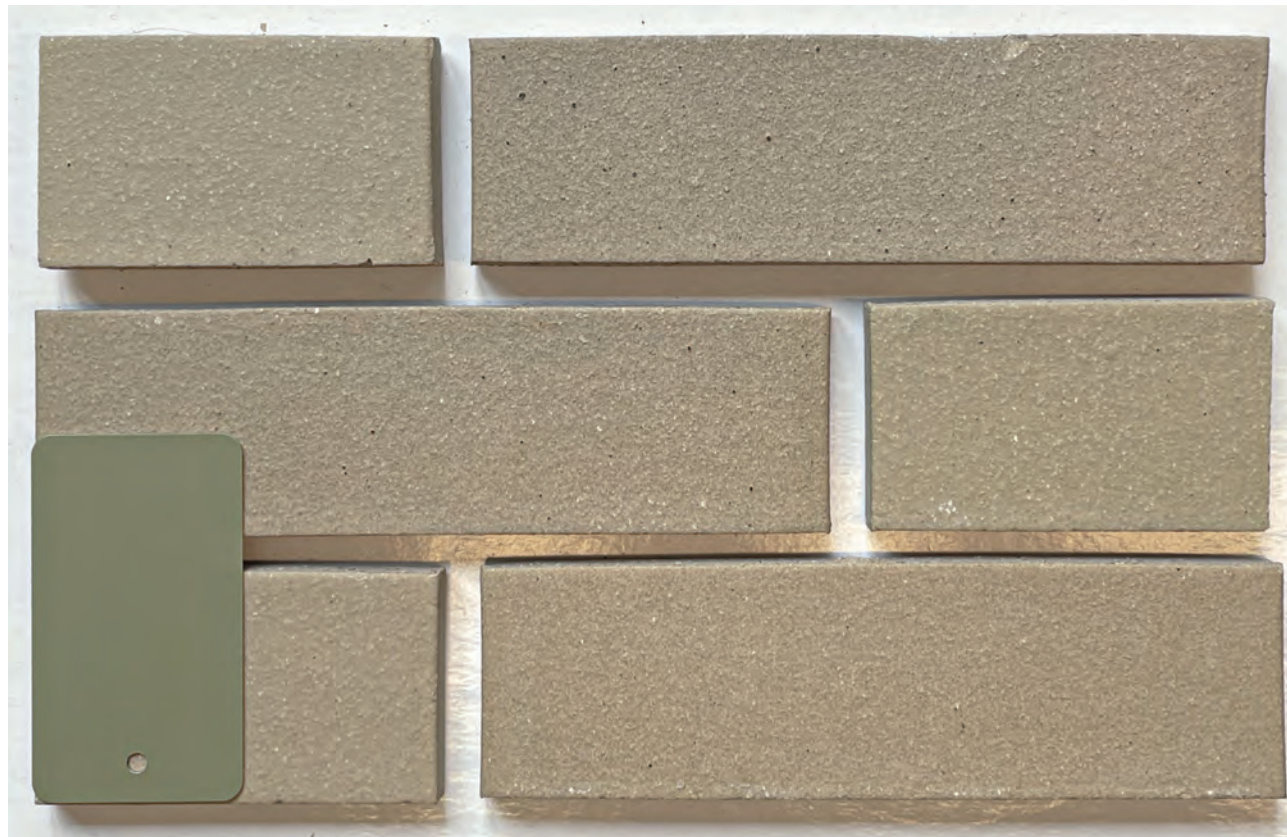
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GREEN METAL WINDOW

TAN BRICK



TAN SIDING



BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
BERKS ST RENDERING



BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
BERKS ST RENDERING

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BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
WILT ST RENDERING

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BERKS ST TOWNHOMES
WILT ST RENDERING

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APRIL 7TH, 2025

**THE MINUTES OF THE 695TH STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**FRIDAY, 10 JULY 2020
REMOTE MEETING ON WEBEX
ROBERT THOMAS, CHAIR**

CALL TO ORDER

START TIME IN WEBEX RECORDING: 00:00:00

Mr. Thomas, the Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. and announced the presence of a quorum. The following Commissioners joined her:

Commissioner	Present	Absent	Comment
Robert Thomas, AIA, Chair	x		
Emily Cooperman, Ph.D., Committee on Historic Designation Chair	x		
Mark Dodds (Division of Housing & Community Development)	x		
Kelly Edwards, MUP	x		
Steven Hartner (Department of Public Property)		x	
Labaron Lenard-Palmer (Dept. of Planning & Development)	x		
Josh Lippert (Department of Licenses & Inspections)	x		
John Mattioni, Esq.	x		
Dan McCoubrey, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, Architectural Committee Chair	x		
Jessica Sánchez, Esq. (City Council President)	x		
H. Ahada Stanford, Ph.D. (Commerce Department)	x		
Betty Turner, MA, Vice Chair	x		
Kimberly Washington, Esq.	x		

Owing to public health concerns surrounding the COVID-19 virus, all Commissioners, staff, applicants, and public attendees participated in the meeting remotely via Cisco Webex video and audio-conferencing software.

The following staff members were present:

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
Kim Chantry, Historic Preservation Planner II
Laura DiPasquale, Historic Preservation Planner II
Shannon Garrison, Historic Preservation Planner I
Meredith Keller, Historic Preservation Planner II
Allyson Mehley, Historic Preservation Planner II
Leonard Reuter, Esq., Law Department
Megan Cross Schmitt, Historic Preservation Planner II

The following persons attended the online meeting:

Patricia Kinsman
Raymond Ricketts

The Historical Commission found that:

- The designation of the building is limited to the main block as delineated in the nomination. However, the larger property holds archaeological potential.

The Historical Commission concluded that:

- The Fishtown neighborhood has proven to contain high archaeological potential, and there is potential that archaeological resources remain underground at the property, satisfying Criterion I.
- The main block of the building represents the foundational development of Fishtown and is typical of the early nineteenth-century wooden houses constructed for the area's residents, satisfying Criterion J

ACTION: Ms. Cooperman moved to find that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 1132 Marlborough Street satisfies Criteria for Designation I and J, and to designate it as historic, listing it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Ms. Turner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous consent.

ITEM: 1132 MARLBOROUGH ST					
MOTION: Designate, Criteria I and J					
MOVED BY: Cooperman					
SECONDED BY: Turner					
VOTE					
Commissioner	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Thomas, Chair	x				
Cooperman	x				
Dodds (DHCD)	x				
Edwards	x				
Hartner (DPP)					x
Lenard-Palmer (DPD)	x				
Lippert (L&I)	x				
Mattioni	x				
McCoubrey	x				
Sánchez (Council)	x				
Stanford (Commerce)	x				
Turner, Vice Chair	x				
Washington	x				
Total	12				1

EMERGENCY MATTER

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, jon.farnham@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This application proposes the complete demolition of the St. Laurentius church building at 1600-06 E. Berks Street. A small section of the building at the rear extends onto the property at 1608-10 E. Berks Street. The application contends that the Historical Commission should approve the demolition as necessary in the public interest to abate a dangerous condition that poses a threat to public safety.

The applicant has provided an engineer's report by Jan Vacca of the Harman Group that indicates that the two towers or steeples are failing and have an 80% chance of collapse in three years and a 100% chance of collapse in 10 years. The report is attached. The Commissioner of the Department of Licenses & Inspections, executive director of the Historical Commission, and the Commission's attorney met with the property owner, engineer, and attorney to further discuss the engineer's report. The Commissioner requested that the property owner provide a second engineer's report from an independent, qualified structural engineer. That report was not yet completed at the time of the writing of this overview. Owing to the extremely poor condition of the building and the likelihood of a catastrophic collapse, the Commissioner requested that the Historical Commission consider this matter as soon as possible and not wait for the next round of reviews in late July and early August. Therefore, this matter was placed on the Historical Commission's July 2020 agenda as an emergency matter.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia closed St. Laurentius parish in 2014 and relocated the parishioners to nearby Holy Name of Jesus Church. Sidewalk protection and other measures to protect the public from the building have been in place since at least 2014. The Department of Licenses & Inspections declared the building Unsafe in April 2015. Concerned about the fate of the building, neighbors nominated it for designation. The Historical Commission designated the property on 10 July 2015 over the objections of the owner at the time, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as well as the parish responsible for the property, Holy Name. The owner claimed that the building was in very poor condition and designating it would be a hardship for the parish.

About the time of designation, the owner entered into an agreement in which a developer would rehabilitate the church for multi-family residential use. The developer obtained a zoning permit for the new use in 2016. Despite the promise of the repair and rehabilitation of the church for residential use, a group of community members appealed the zoning permit, holding up the redevelopment project for years. After defending the zoning permit in court for several years, the developer eventually capitulated and walked away from the project. Other prospective buyers who might have rehabilitated the building came and went, scared off by the lengthy litigation. Eventually, the Commonwealth Court upheld the zoning permit in 2019, but the building had deteriorated significantly during the intervening time. Throughout the litigation, the building suffered from minor collapses of the exterior stone. The Department of Licenses & Inspections inspected the building regularly and required additional sidewalk protection measures and engineering reports. In 2019, the Archdiocese undertook some repairs to stabilize the building's masonry envelope. In early 2020, the current owner purchased the property from the Archdiocese.

In 2016 and 2017, the Historical Commission reviewed a nomination proposing to designate the interior of the church, including a series of murals depicting events in Catholic and Polish history. At the January 2017 meeting, the nominator withdrew the nomination, fearing that a designation might prevent the building from successfully being rehabilitated. Since that time,

community members have been seeking to remove the artistically and culturally significant murals and stained glass windows from the church and relocate them for preservation, display, and interpretation at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa near Doylestown, Pennsylvania. The current owner is reportedly supportive of that effort.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN WEBEX RECORDING: 02:46:30

RECUSAL:

- Mr. Mattioni recused from the review, owing to his law firm's representation of a party involved in the matter.

PRESENTERS:

- Mr. Farnham presented the application to the Historical Commission.
- Attorney Matt McClure, engineers Janis Vacca and Mark Coggin, property owner Humberto Fernandini, and economic consultant Peter Angelides represented the application.
- Attorney Michael Mattioni represented parties who have an agreement with the property owner to remove artifacts from the building.

DISCUSSION:

- Mr. McClure introduced his team. He stated that he is presenting an application to demolish the church, which is necessitated by a need to protect public safety, not a development project. He reserved his right to submit a financial hardship application at a later date.
- Mr. McClure explained that the streets around the church on three sides are very narrow and a school is located to the west of the church. The steeples are 135 feet tall, much wider than the 30 and 50-foot wide streets. The school supports the application.
- Mr. McClure stated that the structural problems with the towers have been well known for at least seven years. Several engineer's reports have highlighted the problems. Mr. McClure stated that his client purchased the church in January 2020 with the intent of rehabilitating the church. However, that is not possible. There is a very real potential for a complete structural failure. The towers pose an imminent risk of collapse. There is no feasible way to repair the towers. Demolition needs to begin immediately to abate the dangerous condition. Owing to the need to demolish the towers in a short time frame, the only way to do so is to demolish the entire church. He explained that the safest way to remove the towers is to do so from the south, to ensure that the towers do not collapse into the street.
- Mr. McClure stated that he and his team as well as the owner are all new to this matter, which has been ongoing for many years. They bring new eyes and new intentions.
- Ms. Vacca stated that she has been a structural engineer for more than 40 years. She listed several rehabilitation projects she has undertaken. She stated that there is a 100% chance of collapse of the towers within 10 years and an 80% chance in three years. She stated that four other engineers who have inspected this church in recent years have recommended demolition. The north façade with the towers have significant cracking on the façade. Ms. Vacca referred to her report. The level of the cracking of the interior plaster is frightening. The cracking is indicative of horizontal displacement and of displacement outward. She stated that it was important to inspect the backup schist masonry, not just the exterior brownstone façade. She

explained that they removed plaster at the cracks in the interior to inspect the structural stone behind it. She stated that the 35-inch thick masonry walls behind the plaster, the structural walls, had cracked through. The western wall of the northwestern tower had displaced outward two inches. Each tower weighs about 500,000 pounds from the watertable upward. The timber steeples add to that weight. She stated that they used a boroscope to inspect the mortar between the structural stone and the façade stone. She stated that the mortar had deteriorated from years of freezing and thawing. She stated that the repairs that had sought to anchor the façade back to the structural stone had not been successful. She stated that the timber in the steeples is in good condition but the connection between the timber and the masonry was designed in such a way that the east and west walls of the towers are not stable. The diagonal masonry of the turrets may have tied the towers together, but that masonry has lost any bond. Ms. Vacca stated that the only repairs undertaken at the church related to the façade, not to the structural integrity of the towers. She stated that the towers need to be demolished down to the watertable. There is no feasible way to repair the towers. She stated that the demolition might need to proceed below the watertable, depending on the condition of the mortar. She stated that the backup structure is made up of small stones and is therefore dependent on the mortar, which has decayed from freeze/thaw cycles. The cracks in the structural stone are the basis for the conclusion that a cataclysmic failure will occur. Ms. Vacca stated that the demolition will be very challenging. She stated that the towers are 135 feet tall, 75 feet above the watertable. The towers weigh 500,000 pounds above the watertable. The temporary repairs that were undertaken will not prevent a collapse. The nearby power lines add complexity to the demolition. Ms. Vacca stated that the towers must be demolished from the south, from the sanctuary. If one wanted to save the nave, it would require time for design and money for the erection of a steel structure, which is not feasible. She concluded that the towers are in danger of imminent collapse.

- Mr. Thomas asked about the possibility of partial demolition. Ms. Vacca stated that partial demolition is infeasible. She stated that designing and installing a steel structure that would allow partial demolition would take from six to nine months and would be very expensive. She stated that they do not have that much time. The towers must be demolished before the next freeze/thaw cycle. The building should be demolished as quickly as possible in the safest way.
- Mr. Coggin, a structural engineer, provided his credentials. He stated that he has reviewed all of the other engineer's reports prepared on this building. He stated that the building was deteriorating long before the first report in 2013. He summarized the reports. He stated that improper repairs have been undertaken to the masonry at the building. He stated that earlier reports called for demolishing the towers and the entire building. Earlier reports noted deteriorated masonry, cracks, displacement, bowing, and other problems with the towers. The towers are like tubes that gain strength from the turrets at the corners. However, the masonry at the turrets is deteriorated. The timber steeples are not connected to the towers. The towers are displacing and cantilevering out. He noted that the reports note continuing deterioration and active façade movement. Earlier reports stated that the towers should be repaired or demolished. He stated that the July 2019 repairs were minimal and only attempted to pin some of the façade stone to the backup stone. The repairs did not address the structural problems with the towers. The massive window openings are a detriment to the structural stability of the towers. All of the lancet windows show cracking, which is a sign of structural failure.

- Mr. McClure asked Mr. Coggin if he agreed with Ms. Vacca. Mr. Coggin stated that he agrees with Ms. Vacca's report on the building. He stated that the building is a danger to the public and has been considered as such since 2013. The towers have significant structural problems and, when they collapse, the collapse will be catastrophic. Mr. Coggin stated that the towers should be demolished before the next freeze/thaw cycle. Mr. Coggin stated that he inspected the interiors of the towers, climbing to the highest accessible levels in both towers. He stated that he inspected the areas where Ms. Vacca had removed the interior plaster to expose the structural cracks. He also noted that the brownstone was laid in such a way that water penetrates it and it deteriorates and spalls away. He stated that the stones also shear at the bedding planes. There is no integrity between the backup and cladding.
- Mr. Fernandini, the property owner, stated that he purchased the church to save it. However, his engineers convinced him that the towers are beyond repair. He stated that the most important issue is safety. He stated that the stained glass windows, murals, and other artifacts will be salvaged and transferred to a museum.
- Mr. Angelides, an economic consultant, stated that he analyzed the project as though there were no time constraints. He determined whether it would make economic sense to stabilize and repair the building if there were no need to act immediately. He observed that it would not make economic sense to stabilize the building, remove the towers, and reuse the building. Stabilizing the building to allow demolition of the towers from the north would require a significant steel structure that would be expensive. That work and other work, like roofing over the sections where the towers were located would cost at least \$2 million, maybe much more. Then the building would need to be rehabilitated for the new use. Rebuilding the towers would cost an additional \$2 million. The new use would likely be residential. Rehabilitating an old building for a new use is already expensive. This project would have added costs, at least \$2 million. The apartments that would result would be compromised, owing to the constraints of the building. The units would be less attractive than comparably sized new units, and therefore produce less income. There is no space for onsite parking. The reuse of this building is not economically feasible.
- Ms. Sanchez asked why repairing the towers is not feasible. She asked why the façade cannot be pinned.
 - Mr. Coggin responded that the pinning of the cladding to the backup could be undertaken, but that would not solve the structural problems. The problem is with the backup masonry material, which supports the towers and is failing. The pinning would not address the overall stability of the towers. The pinning would not prevent a collapse. The corners of the towers have no structural integrity.
 - Ms. Vacca stated that pinning and pointing the façade will have to impact on the structural problems. The towers will still fail.
- Mr. Thomas asked about the structural condition of the main body of the church.
 - Ms. Vacca stated that she did not review the main body of the church.
- Mr. Thomas asked about funding sources like tax credits.
 - Mr. McClure stated that they did not look at tax credits and other funding opportunities because the building is about to collapse. He stated that they do not have time to assemble funding sources. The building must be confronted immediately. He pointed the Commission to Commissioner Perri's letter, which states that the structural problems and threat of collapse must be addressed immediately, before school starts and the next freeze/thaw cycle. There is no time to seek such funding, which might take years to obtain. Such funding might

have made a difference in 2013 or 2015, if there had been no litigation. That time has passed.

- Ms. Cooperman stated that the Historical Commission is not reviewing a financial hardship application.
 - Mr. McClure agreed. He stated that they included financial information because some have asked for it, but the application is a request for approval as necessary in the public interest.
- Mr. Mattioni stated that he sent a letter to the Historical Commission indicating that his client, Holy Name of Jesus Parish, has no opposition to the application.
- Ms. Cooperman excused herself from the meeting at 2:13 p.m. When she left, she sent a Webex Chat to all panelists announcing her departure and stating that “I agree we need input from Architectural Committee and we don't have sufficient information today.”
 - Mr. Farnham reminded the Commissioners not to use the Webex Chat feature to discuss the merits of a matter under consideration because the Commissioners are required to deliberate in public. He then read Ms. Cooperman's Chat for everyone participating to hear.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- A.J. Thomson started by thanking Ms. Cooperman, who “served” as part of his “panel” when he and his team submitted the nomination to designate this property five years ago. He referred to the engineers' testimony today as “very credible.” He stated that “Venise Whittaker and her misguided people” stopped the redevelopment of the property with a law suit. He stated that immigrants sacrificed to build this structure. He asked the Historical Commission to compel the owner to hire a new engineer of the Commission's choosing to verify the results of the other engineers. He concluded that the Commission must be right if it approves the demolition of this building; it must do its due diligence.
- Andrew Miller, a neighbor, stated that the owner was aware of his obligations when he purchased the property and that there is time to stabilize the building. He stated that the Historical Commission must vote no on this application.
- Dana Fedeli opposed the demolition of the church. She stated that the former owner repaired the building. She stated that, even if the towers were removed, the remainder of the building could be saved. She questioned the motives of the applicant and consultant. She claimed that this is not an emergency. She discussed the zoning of the property. She questioned the review process.
- Dustin Dove questioned the motives and intentions of the property owner. He opposed the demolition.
- Evan Schlesinger, a near neighbor, stated that the safety of the people who live right around the church is taken into consideration. He stated that the neighbors prefer preservation and know that demolition can go wrong. He asked the Historical Commission to collect more information and consider alternatives.
- Jim Duffin stated that he understands the need to consider this on an expedited manner. He contended that the Commission and advisory committees can call special meetings. He stated that the application needs a full vetting. A special meeting of the Architectural Committee should have been called.
- Jeanne Curtis stated that she was involved with the nominations of the exterior and interior of St. Laurentius and has been involved in research and academic study of the church. She spoke about how the building reflected the original parishioners. She

suggested that building should be recorded inside and out. She suggested that all alternatives be considered. She offered her research.

- John Scott commented on the earlier litigation and the recent zoning change. He said that the towers are “non-structural stone walls.” He asserted that the building can be reused.
- John Wisniewski noted that there have been concerns about the structure since 2013, but it is still standing. He reported that he wrote the interior nomination, which was later withdrawn. He asked the Historical Commission to consider the architectural, cultural, and religious significance of the church. He thanked the owner for cooperating with the removal of the windows and murals. He asked the Commission to act judiciously.
- Justin Spivey, an engineer, stated that he has been retained by the Preservation Alliance. Paul Steinke of the Preservation Alliance stated that he would ask questions of Mr. Spivey. Mr. Steinke suggested that the Architectural Committee should review this application. Mr. Steinke noted the letter that he sent to the Historical Commission when he first learned of this application. Mr. Steinke asked Mr. Spivey about his qualifications, which Mr. Spivey provided. Mr. Steinke asked Mr. Spivey to present his findings.
 - Mr. Spivey stated that he inspected the building from the exterior using binoculars. He stated that some action is needed to stabilize the building. Mr. Spivey stated that a building collapse is not imminent. He observed that seven years of reports have called immediate action and yet the building has not collapsed. He said that the structure has “reserve strength.” He stated that the structures of the towers is timber, which is in good repair. He stated that recent repairs on the exterior have not re-cracked. He said that no one has done a complete, hands-on examination of the exterior. Mr. Spivey stated that the recent repairs have slowed the process of deterioration by preventing water infiltration. Moreover, the cracks have not reopened since repaired. He stated that the remainder of the structure, outside the towers, appears to be very stable. Mr. Spivey claimed that there are options other than demolition. He stated that scaffolding will need to be erected whether the towers are demolished or repaired. He claimed that the scaffolding could be upgraded to structural scaffolding for little money. He claimed that the scaffolding could be structural and could hold up the towers. Structural scaffolding would allow time for more analysis and could be used for deconstruction or repair. He stated that it is feasible to deconstruct the towers down to the watertable and reuse the rest of the building. In conclusion, he suggested that there are anchoring systems like Cintec that could be used to repair the towers.
 - Mr. Steinke asked the Historical Commission to remand this application to Architectural Committee and also asked the Historical Commission to order the property owner to immediately install structural scaffolding.
- Kevin Brett stated that he is an attorney for a corporation but is here today on his own. He accused Mr. McClure of “alarmism.” He claimed that documents show that the current owner has wanted to demolish the church since late 2019. He accused Mr. McClure of “false-alarmism.” He stated that the owner, Historical Commission, and Department of Licenses & Inspections should jointly issue a request for proposals for redeveloping the property.
- Mason Carter suggested sending this application to the Architectural Committee. He seconded Mr. Spivey’s suggestion regarding scaffolding. He observed that the property is not cited as Imminently Dangerous.

- Rachel Kaminski stated that she is concerned about the environmental impact of the demolition of the church. She stated that she is concerned about dust. She asked the Commission to vote no on the application until dust and other safety concerns are addressed.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION:

- At the end of the public comment, Mr. Reuter, the Commission's attorney, explained why the Historical Commission was appropriately hearing this matter today, without referral to the Architectural Committee. He stated that the Rules & Regulations do not require applications proposing demolition as necessary in the public interest to be reviewed by the Architectural Committee. He stated that, in light of Commissioner Perri's letter indicating the urgency of this matter, the application merited forwarding to the Commission as soon as possible. Finally, he noted that under Administrative Law, bodies may waive their rules, especially in emergency circumstances. The Historical Commission is rightly hearing this application and may make a final decision today. He added that the Historical Commission has the authority to refer the matter to the Architectural Committee. He disagreed with Mr. Duffin that the Architectural Committee has the authority to unilaterally call its own special meeting. He suggested that the Historical Commissioners read Commissioner Perri's letter. He noted that the Commissioner has indicated that this matter is urgent. He concluded that the Commissioner has police powers in this matter and could order the demolition of the building without the Historical Commission's input.
- Mr. McCoubrey stated that the Department of Licenses & Inspections can also order the owner to repair the building.
- Mr. Reuter stated that the City has been involved in enforcement proceedings regarding this property for years. He stated that all of the protections and repairs were undertaken at the Department's orders. He stated that the City has been pursuing enforcement in the court for years. Mr. Reuter stated that the Department, Historical Commission, and Law Department have been involved in this property every day for years. He stated that the City has not been absent, but has been trying to compel the property owner to bring this property into compliance. The Department and Historical Commission have met with the former and current owners and have pressed for repairs and engineers' reports.
- Ms. Edwards asked if the Department would be responsible for next steps with regard to ensuring that the building is safe if the Historical Commission denied the application.
 - Mr. Reuter responded in the affirmative and noted that the applicant could appeal.
- Mr. Thomas suggested that the Historical Commission should deny total demolition and suggest that the owner find a means for removing the towers and stabilizing the building.
- Ms. Stanford stated that the building is not Imminently Dangerous. She suggested looking at all alternatives.
- Ms. Turner agreed.
- Mr. McCoubrey agreed.
- Mr. Thomas recommended denying the application and referring it to the Architectural Committee for review.
- Mr. Reuter responded that the Historical Commission cannot condition the denial of an application, for example deny it and refer it to the Architectural Committee. He

suggested that, if the Commission intends to deny this application, it should first hear from the applicant, who would like to rebut.

- Mr. Farnham asked the Historical Commission not to take a final action on the application without hearing from the applicant and the members of the public who have not spoken.
- Mr. McClure stated that he respects the process and the diligence of the Historical Commission, but respectfully request that the Commission make a decision no later than its August meeting, owing to the public safety hazard that this building poses. He also stated that both of his engineers “vehemently, vehemently disagree” with Mr. Spivey’s conclusions, especially about structural scaffolding.
- Mr. Farnham stated that the Historical Commission should make a decision no later than its 14 August 2020 meeting. If it has not made a decision by that time, the Department of Licenses & Inspections may need to take matters into its own hands.
- Mr. Thomas asked if the matter needed to be referred to the Committee on Financial Hardship. Mr. Reuter stated that it does not. He explained that making a determination of necessity in the public interest requires the Historical Commission to determine if feasible alternatives exist. Financial information may provide a basis for determining if feasible alternatives exist. A full Committee on Financial Hardship meeting is not necessary for such a determination. Feasibility determinations should consider costs.
- Mr. Farnham observed that the email and Webex Q&A comments on this application have been incorporated into the record.

ACTION: Ms. Edwards moved that the Historical Commission continue the application for 1600-06 E. Berks Street to its 14 August 2020 meeting and refer it to the Architectural Committee at its 28 July 2020 meeting for a recommendation. Ms. Turner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous consent.

ITEM: 1600-06 E BERKS ST MOTION: Continue to August PHC meeting and remand to July AC meeting MOVED BY: Edwards SECONDED BY: Turner					
VOTE					
Commissioner	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Thomas, Chair	x				
Cooperman					x
Dodds (DHCD)	x				
Edwards	x				
Hartner (DPP)					x
Lenard-Palmer (DPD)	x				
Lippert (L&I)	x				
Mattioni				x	
McCoubrey	x				
Sánchez (Council)	x				
Stanford (Commerce)	x				
Turner, Vice Chair	x				
Washington					x
Total	9			1	3

**MEETING OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**TUESDAY, 28 JULY 2020
REMOTE MEETING ON ZOOM
DAN MCCOUBREY, CHAIR**

CALL TO ORDER

START TIME IN AUDIO RECORDING: 00:00:00

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The following Committee members joined him:

Committee Member	Present	Absent	Comment
Dan McCoubrey, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C, Chair	X		
John Cluver, AIA, LEED AP	X		
Rudy D'Alessandro	X		
Justin Detwiler	X		
Nan Gutterman, FAIA	X		
Suzanne Pentz		X	
Amy Stein, AIA, LEED AP	X		

Owing to public health concerns surrounding the COVID-19 virus, all Commissioners, staff, applicants, and public attendees participated in the meeting remotely via Zoom video and audio-conferencing software.

The following staff members were present:

- Jon Farnham, Executive Director
- Kim Chantry, Historic Preservation Planner II
- Laura DiPasquale, Historic Preservation Planner II
- Meredith Keller, Historic Preservation Planner II
- Allyson Mehley, Historic Preservation Planner II
- Megan Cross Schmitt, Historic Preservation Planner II

The following persons were present:

- Paul Steinke, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
- David Jacovini
- Jim Conners, SGRA
- Jacob Adelman, Philadelphia Inquirer
- Ashley May
- Mary McGettigan
- Steve Perzan
- Michael Silverman
- Bernice Koplin
- Dennis Waterman
- Adam Branovan
- Marissa Raybuck
- Mary Purcell

- Elements of the design are incompatible with the Society Hill Historic District.

The Architectural Committee concluded that:

- The application as submitted does not meet Standards 8 and 9.
- The denial for Standard 9 is based on the design's size, scale, proportions, height, and design elements.

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Architectural Committee voted to recommend denial, pursuant to Standard 8 and 9.

ITEM: 232-36 Walnut St MOTION: Denial MOVED BY: Cluver SECONDED BY: D'Alessandro					
VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Dan McCoubrey	X				
John Cluver	X				
Rudy D'Alessandro	X				
Justin Detwiler	X				
Nan Gutterman	X				
Suzanne Pentz					X
Amy Stein	X				
Total	6				1

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, jon.farnham@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This application proposes the complete demolition of the St. Laurentius church building at 1600-06 E. Berks Street. Section 14-1005(6)(d) of the historic preservation ordinance stipulates that:

No building permit shall be issued for the demolition of a historic building ... unless the Historical Commission finds that issuance of the building permit is necessary in the public interest, or unless the Historical Commission finds that the building ... cannot be used for any purpose for which it is or may be reasonably adapted.

This application contends that the Historical Commission should approve the demolition as necessary in the public interest to abate a dangerous condition that poses a threat to public safety. The Department of Licenses & Inspections declared the building Unsafe in April 2015. The Historical Commission designated it in July 2015 over the objections of the owner, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, who claimed that the building was in very poor condition and repairing it would be a hardship. A current owner purchased the church in January 2020.

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE, 28 JULY 2020

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

PHILADELPHIA'S PRINCIPAL PUBLIC STEWARD OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

In June 2020, the owner submitted an engineer's report to the Historical Commission and Department of Licenses & Inspections that indicates that the two towers are failing and pose a public safety hazard. In response to the report, the L&I Commissioner requested that the property owner provide a second engineer's report from an independent, qualified structural engineer. The second report was submitted in early July. It concurs with the findings of the first report and also provides a detailed history of the many recent engineering analyses of the building. After the second report confirmed the findings of the first, the L&I Commissioner requested that the Historical Commission consider the application on an expedited basis at its July 10 monthly meeting, without referral to the Architectural Committee, owing to a need to address the public safety concerns immediately. On July 9, the Commissioner of the Department of Licenses & Inspections sent a letter to the Historical Commission explaining his request. The letter indicates that the danger posed by the building must be abated as soon as possible, especially before students return to the adjacent school and freeze/thaw cycles begin.

The Historical Commission considered the application at its July 10 meeting and after a lengthy presentation by the applicant, considerable debate by the Commissioners, and extensive public comment, the Commission voted to refer the application to the Architectural Committee for a recommendation.

Owing to the public safety hazard posed by the towers and the Historical Commission's decision to delay a decision to its meeting on August 14, the L&I Commissioner retained an independent engineer to evaluate the building. The Commissioner and the engineer inspected the building on July 24 and the Commissioner issued a letter with the engineer's report to the Historical Commission on July 27.

The Commissioner's letter contends that the Historical Commission should approve the demolition of both towers and that the demolition should be undertaken from the rear, through the sanctuary. He also states that structural bracing or scaffolding of the towers is not a practical alternative to removing the towers. He concludes that the focus should be on saving portions of the building for incorporation into a new building. While discussing his latest letter with the Historical Commission's staff, the Commissioner indicated that the north or front façade along Berks Street and the east or side façade along Memphis Street might be able to be saved and incorporated into a new building, but the rest of the church will need to be demolished to get to the towers from the south or rear along Wilt Street. The Commissioner states in his letter that owing to the tight dimensions of the site, adjacent buildings and narrow streets, the safest and most practical method to demolish the two towers is to stage the demolition from the south side. This approach however necessitates substantial demolition of the former sanctuary.

The Department of Licenses & Inspections is the City agency with the expertise and authority to determine when buildings poses threats to public safety. The Department has determined that this church building poses a hazard to public safety and that the hazard must be abated quickly with the demolition of the towers. The Historical Commission should accept the Department's determination on its face. The task before the Historical Commission and Architectural Committee is to determine whether there are reasonable alternatives when demolishing that might save some of the building while protecting public health, safety, and welfare. The Historical Commission and Architectural Committee should accept the Commissioner's assertion that the Historical Commission should approve the demolition of both towers and that the demolition should be undertaken from the rear, through the sanctuary.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 03:50:28

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE, 28 JULY 2020

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

PHILADELPHIA'S PRINCIPAL PUBLIC STEWARD OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

PRESENTERS:

- Mr. Farnham presented the application to the Architectural Committee.
- Attorney Matt McClure, engineers Janis Vacca and Mark Coggin, and economic consultant Peter Angelides represented the application.
- Attorney Michael Mattioni represented parties who have an agreement with the property owner to remove artifacts from the building.

DISCUSSION:

- Mr. McClure introduced his team. He stated that he is presenting an application to demolish the church, which is necessitated by a need to protect public safety, not a development project. He reserved his right to submit a financial hardship application at a later date.
- Mr. McClure stated that the church cannot be considered devoid of its context. He explained that the streets around the church on three sides are very narrow and a school is located 10 feet to the west of the church. The steeples are 135 feet tall, much wider than the 30 and 50-foot wide streets. The school supports the application.
- Mr. McClure stated that the structural problems with the towers have been well known for at least seven years. The problems were discussed at the time the church was nominated, but the Historical Commission tried to limit the conversation to the historical and architectural merits, and not the condition. He asserted that the Historical Commission should have considered the condition of the towers. He noted that the nominator claimed at the designation review that the towers have structural issues that are being addressed, but the building is otherwise in good condition. He opined that that statement was false at the time and potentially reckless. Several engineer's reports have highlighted the problems. Mr. McClure stated that efforts to redevelop the church were thwarted through litigation. Designating alone does not fix structural issues. The poor condition of the building has been "an inconvenient truth."
- Mr. McClure stated that his client purchased the church in January 2020 with the intent of rehabilitating the church. His client paid \$350,000 for the plans to redevelop the church. However, that is not possible. Several structural engineers have concluded that there is a very real potential for a complete structural failure. The towers pose an imminent risk of collapse. The potential for structural failure has been confirmed by David Perri, the Commissioner of the Department of Licenses & Inspections, in a letter, and by the Urban Engineers report, which Mr. Perri commissioned. Time is of the essence. Demolition should start now. There is no feasible way to repair the towers. Demolition needs to begin immediately to abate the dangerous condition. Owing to the need to demolish the towers in a short time frame, the only way to do so is to demolish the entire church. He explained that the safest way to remove the towers is to do so from the south, to ensure that the towers do not collapse into the street.
- Mr. McClure summarized the testimony to come from his witnesses. He stated that his team immediately made the City aware of the structural problems at this building. He asserted that, even if he had all the time he needed to respond to the conditions and the church was set in an open area, providing a large collapse zone, there would still be no financially feasible way to repair the towers. He stated that this is not a financial hardship application but observed that the Architectural Committee can consider financial information when deciding necessity in the public interest cases.

He stated that he reserved the right to submit a financial hardship application in the future.

- Mr. McClure stated that he and his team as well as the owner are all new to this matter, which has been ongoing for many years. They bring new eyes and new intentions. He stated that three structural engineers with no involvement in a new construction project have all concluded in the last three months that the towers must be demolished from the south.
- Mr. McClure read from Commissioner Perri's letter of 27 July 2020: "We witnessed damage to the towers' exterior brownstone façade and more significantly, cracking and related horizontal displacement (previously measured at up to 2-in.) of the interior mica schist stone cores. As a result of structural cracking, portions of the exterior walls of the towers are leaning outward and are partially freestanding." He again stated that the school is 10 feet from the church. He again quoted the Commissioner, who wrote that "the installation of long-term structural bracing and/or the erection of structural scaffolding to gain additional time is not a practical alternative given the dire condition of the tower." Quoting the Commissioner again, Mr. McClure read that "the safest and most practical method to demolish the two towers is to stage the demolition from the south side. This approach however will necessitate substantial demolition of the former sanctuary." Mr. McClure then referred to the structural engineer's report attached to the letter. Quoting from the report, he read that "it is Urban Engineer's opinion that demolition or deconstruction commence from the south in order to dictate the direction of an intended or unintended collapse and mitigate risk exposure as quickly as possible."
- Mr. McClure stated that the interior of the church is "breathtaking." The owner is working with the Archdiocese, Holy Name Parish, and Our Lady of Czestochowa in Doylestown to have the St. Jude Liturgical Art Society remove artifacts including the paintings and stained glass. The artifacts will be removed in August and relocated to Our Lady of Czestochowa.
- Mr. McClure commented on the engineer's report prepared for the Preservation Alliance by Justin Spivey. He stated that it is unlike a typical engineer's report. It parses its language very carefully. He questioned the report's analyses of his engineer's reports and stated that his engineer's reports were not prepared as part of an application but instead to advise his client and the City of the structural problems. He stated that the reports were not revised by any attorney, but are solely the engineer's assessments of the structural problems. The reports were written to alert the owner and City to the conditions, not in support of any applications.
- Mr. McClure stated that Mr. Spivey appeared as an advocate for the designation of the property at the meeting at which the Historical Commission designated it. Mr. McClure stated that Mr. Spivey did not focus his testimony on the condition of the building, but instead on whether the building satisfied the Criteria for Designation. He has a long history of advocating for this property that is unrelated to reviewing its structural condition. Mr. McClure claimed that Mr. Spivey contacted Commissioner Perri regarding this building. He noted that when Commissioner Perri and his engineer inspected the building they did so with knowledge of Mr. Spivey's position and rejected that position when drawing their conclusions.
- Mr. McClure stated that several members of the public engaged in ad hominem attacks of his team and made unsubstantiated claims of bait-and-switch tactics and lying on the part of his team. He stated that his engineers are professionals and are saying what they are saying because they believe it. He stated that we now live in a society where facts do not seem to matter and anything may be said. He asked the

Committee to focus on the facts. He concluded that the engineers' investigations have been exceedingly thorough.

- Ms. Vacca stated that she has been a structural engineer for more than 40 years. She stated that there is a 100% chance of collapse of portions of the towers within 10 years and an 80% chance in three years. She stated that she has experience with demolitions. She stated that she was approached by the owner of the property in June 2020 to evaluate the building. She stated that as many as seven other engineers have inspected this church in recent years. The owner provided her with 10 to 15 earlier engineer's reports on the building. She explained to the owner that he did not need another façade inventory. Instead, she inspected the interior of the church. She stated that the towers have significant cracking that is frightening. She explained the structural system of the towers which is masonry below and timber above. She stated that significant cracking has occurred inside the towers where the timber spires sit on the masonry, where the masonry carries the load of the timber spires. She stated that the façade is a five-inch thick brownstone façade with occasional header courses that extend back into the schist masonry backup. The schist is the masonry that holds up the building. Earlier reports indicate that the headers that tie the façade material to the backup have sheared off. She explained that they removed plaster at the cracks in the interior to inspect the structural stone behind it. She stated that the 35-inch thick masonry walls behind the plaster, the 30 inches of structural wall and five inches of veneer, have cracked through. There are turrets at the corners of the towers that tie the corners together. She stated that there are cracks in the walls at turrets and the walls have pushed out two inches. The western wall is 10 feet away from the school. The trough cracks are not thermal cracks; they are structural failures of the backup masonry. The cracks result from the load of the 50,000 timber spire and the masonry weight above the watertable of 500,000 pounds. She stated that the towers are in essence four independent walls with no structural integrity at the corners. The tower walls are freestanding walls. . She stated that they used a boroscope to inspect the mortar. She stated that the mortar had deteriorated and is basically dust. The walls have pushed out to the north and east. She stated that the repairs that had sought to anchor the façade back to the structural stone had not been successful. She stated that there have been no repairs to the structural stone. Ms. Vacca stated that the only repairs undertaken at the church related to the façade, not to the structural integrity of the towers. She noted that the repairs to the façade were not entirely successful because there is little to attach to behind the façade. She stated that the existing scaffolding provides no structural stability. She stated that the towers will fall in a "non-ductile" manner. Once it goes, it will just go. She stated that the surrounding school and houses are 10 to 50 feet away. The towers are 135 feet tall with about 75 feet of masonry. Ms. Vacca stated that she has 10 years of experience designing demolitions. She stated that this will be a hand demolition. She stated that partial demolition of the towers would require significant structural steel to support the end of the church nave. The towers cannot be repaired in place; they must be demolished to the watertable. She stated that the towers must be demolished from the south so that they fall to the south if anything goes wrong. She stated that significant structural steel would be required to brace the front façade if it were to be saved during the demolition of the towers. She stated that it would take six months to survey, design, and install the structural steel. Installing the steel would extend into the next freeze/thaw cycle, when the mortar will be further degraded. A failure on one of these towers will be "cataclysmic." When one fails, a significant amount of weight will come down. Ms. Vacca stated that Mr. Spivey's report wrongly indicates that the timber spire sits at

the watertable level, but it does not; it sits on the masonry at the lower bell level. The timbers only sit on the north and south walls of the towers; the east and west walls gain no stability from the timbers. The outward movement of the towers begins where the timbers sit on the towers and continues down from there. Ms. Vacca stated that the cracks in the towers are through cracks; she stated that she is adamant that these towers need to be demolished to ensure public safety. Ms. Vacca stated that there is no way to completely evaluate the structure of this building without inspecting the backup masonry from the interior. She agreed that three independent structural engineers all came to the same conclusions about the danger and need to demolish. Mr. McClure read the definition of imminently dangerous from the Philadelphia Property Maintenance Code and asked Ms. Vacca if this building satisfies the definition of imminently dangerous. She stated that it does satisfy the definition. Ms. Vacca agreed with Mr. McClure that his statements regarding the reason for her retention to inspect the building were accurate. Ms. Vacca stated that his portrayal was accurate. Ms. Vacca stated that the recent repairs, mesh, strapping, scaffolding, and other measures undertaken at this building will do nothing to prevent a structural collapse. On Mr. McClure's question, Ms. Vacca stated that she took Commissioner Perri and the engineer from Urban through the interiors of the towers.

- Mr. D'Alessandro asked Ms. Vacca about the space shown in the photograph on page 19 of Ms. Vacca's report. He asked about its dimension. Ms. Vacca responded that the gap is about eight inches wide and is filled with mortar dust. He asked about the width of that portion of the wall. Ms. Vacca stated that it is about three feet wide. Mr. D'Alessandro responded that it would not be possible to work in that area. There is no room for a person to work.
- Mr. Coggin, a structural engineer, provided his credentials. He stated that he has 35 years of experience. He stated that he was retained to assess Ms. Vacca's report. He stated that he has reviewed all of the other engineer's reports prepared on this building. He stated that the building was deteriorating long before the first report in 2013. He summarized the reports. He noted the water infiltration into the masonry and the effects of freeze/thaw cycles. The brownstone façade has delaminated. He stated that improper repairs have been undertaken to the masonry at the building. He stated that earlier reports called for demolishing the towers and the entire building. One report noted that the church would only have a 20-year life after stabilization. Earlier reports noted deteriorated masonry, mortar lost, cracks, displacement, bowing, and other problems with the towers. The brownstone was laid up incorrectly allowing water infiltration and deterioration. The turrets at the corners are not appropriately design, allowing cracks. The corners are cracked. The towers have larger than typical openings and show signs of stress cracking. An earlier report noted that a failure would be catastrophic. The monitoring in 2016 and 2017 noted increasing deterioration. During this time period, a laser scan was done. Soon after the scan, a large collapse of façade materials occurred, despite the fact that no movement was detected. The bedding stone had sheared, allowing the façade stone to fall down onto the sidewalk. He stated that the July 2019 repairs were minimal and only attempted to pin some of the façade stone to the backup stone. The repairs did not address the structural problems with the towers. The Callahan monitoring concluded that the towers needed to be repaired or demolished quickly. Mr. Coggin stated that he discovered cracks at the heads of lancet windows while undertaking his inspection. The cracks indicated outward movement at the northwest tower. He stated that the mortar at the structural schist is deteriorated and has no bond to the

- stones. There is significant cracking at the lower bell level. The remainder of the tower has been inaccessible, owing to bird guano and carcasses. Mr. Coggin explained that he donned a hazmat suit and respirator and climbed further up the tower than any other engineer has gone. He stated that he found very similar conditions. He stated that the diagonal masonry at the turrets is cracked and does not connect the facades. The facades of the tower are cantilevered out and are not tied back to the timber structure of the spires. Mr. Coggin concluded that the towers are not stable. He noted that Mr. Spivey had claimed that the recent pointing had not cracked, indicating a lack of movement. Mr. Coggin stated that Mr. Spivey is incorrect. There is cracking in the recently installed mortar. Mr. Coggin explained that he used hi-power binoculars and a spotter scope to inspect the exterior facades. Mr. Coggin stated that the major cracking occurs between the head of the middle window and the sill of the highest window, where the timber structure bears on the masonry. He stated that Mr. Spivey is mistaken about the location where the timber rests on the masonry; he incorrectly states that it is at the watertable level. Mr. Coggin stated that the building is imminently dangerous and a large failure could occur. The failure will be sudden and unpredictable. Mr. Coggin disagreed with Mr. Spivey and stated that monitoring is not useful. He stated that it will collapse unexpectedly without prior movement. The towers are unstable and need to be taken down. Mr. Coggin rejected Mr. Spivey's claim that scaffolding could be used to support the towers. The streets are too narrow for the scaffolding. Other designs would take six months for design, not including fabrication and erection. Mr. Coggin discussed the projects that Mr. Spivey presented at the Historical Commission. He noted that the St. Ann's project was very different in that the tower was demolished, not saved, and the closest buildings were 100 feet away. The St. Ann's project is not a good comparison. Mr. Coggin stated that he also reviewed the Mt. Moriah project, which involved supporting a much smaller, shorter building. It too was not a good comparison. Mr. Coggin stated that Mr. Spivey misrepresented the uncertainty about the timeline that Mr. Coggin indicated in his report. Mr. Coggin stated that he does not know when the towers might collapse, but they could collapse at any time.
- Mr. McClure asked Mr. Coggin how long it took to design the structure that was installed to hold up the Rittenhouse Club façade during the 10 Rittenhouse project. Mr. Coggin stated that it took seven or eight months for the design and the cost for the framing was \$1 million. The building in that case was only four stories. He observed that erecting a structure at St. Laurentius would be much more difficult and complex. The bracing would not be a permanent fix. You could not install the bracing before the next freeze/thaw cycle. The project would be difficult and risky. Mr. McClure asked Mr. Coggin what it would take to preserve any of the walls during the demolition. He responded that it would be difficult and expensive. It would take six to eight months to design and another six months to erect it. It would delay demolition of the towers. The towers present an imminent danger to the public. Mr. McClure asked Mr. Coggin if this building satisfied the definition of imminently dangerous in the Philadelphia Code. Mr. Coggin stated that it does. It is imminently dangerous. Mr. McClure asked Mr. Coggin if his characterization of Mr. Coggin's hiring and writing of his report that he offered at the start of the review was accurate. Mr. Coggin stated that it was.
 - Mr. Detwiler asked the applicants about the timeline for a demolition.
 - Ms. Vacca stated that it would take one month to design a strategy to demolish the church. The demolition would take one year.

- Mr. McCoubrey noted that Ms. Vacca's report details one crack and asked if the other corners of the towers are failing.
 - Ms. Vacca stated that the towers are in similar condition with similar displacements of the walls. Each of the corner turrets has a crack. She stated that she removed plaster on the west tower in one location but did not find a through crack. She stated that there are many through cracks at the towers.
 - Mr. Coggin stated that he discovered that the diagonal masonry at the turrets was not bonded to the outside walls at the west tower.
- Mr. McCoubrey asked how the engineers would prevent the building from collapsing to the north onto Berks Street if they came in through the south side of the building.
 - Ms. Vacca stated that she would consult with a demolition contractor, but she believes that the demolition contractor would need to strap or girdle the towers so that they would fall to the south if they fell. She stated that the building would be braced to guarantee the fall direction. She stated that the demolition contractor must ensure that the towers do not fall to the north.
- Ms. Gutterman asked why it would take six months to design a strategy to stabilize the towers. She also asked why the towers cannot be demolished to the bottoms of the louvers, saving some of the towers and the end wall of the church.
 - Ms. Vacca stated that towers must be demolished to at least the watertable, probably farther because the cracking extends below the watertable. If one were to demolish to the bottoms of the louvers only, the towers would still be unstable and susceptible to collapse.
 - Ms. Gutterman asked if the spire is the problem.
 - Ms. Vacca explained that the spire, the copper-clad timber section, attaches to the tower between the louvered opening and the window below. The tower must be demolished to that point to remove the spire. However, the tower suffers from through cracks to a point below the watertable and must be demolished to or below the watertable because it is unstable.
 - Mr. Coggin agreed. He stated that the towers cannot be stabilized in place. The backup masonry is in very poor condition and the cladding and turrets cannot be tied back to it.
 - Ms. Gutterman asked why they can stabilize the towers by girdling for demolition but they cannot stabilize them permanently.
 - Ms. Vacca responded that the girdling for demolition would be done to direct the towers south if they collapsed. The towers cannot be girdled to stabilize them permanently. Ms. Vacca concluded that permanent stabilization and temporary stabilization for demolition are two "entirely different animals."
 - Ms. Gutterman asked Mr. Coggin why he claimed it would require six months to design a permanent basing system.
 - Mr. Coggin replied that it might take four months under perfect conditions, with all of the necessary information at hand, but six months is a more reasonable number. He stated that it would be a very complicated design.
- Mr. Detwiler asked why years have passed with knowledge about the condition of the building and nothing has been done. He stated that the engineering could have already been done.
 - Mr. McClure responded that his client just acquired the building. The property was owned by the Archdiocese until January.
 - Mr. Detwiler responded that his client purchased it knowing of its condition.

- Mr. McClure stated that the purchase may not have been a wise decision, but the owner is addressing the matter now. He noted that the Historical Commission designated the building knowing of its very poor condition.
- Mr. Detwiler responded that the owner is responsible for maintaining the building.
- Mr. McClure stated that his client began addressing the problem as soon as he purchased the building. He had engineers inspect the building and then provided their reports to the City as soon as they were available.
- Ms. Vacca observed that the condition of the building first came under scrutiny during a review that was done to satisfy the façade ordinance. That review appropriately addressed the “skin” of the building. After that, the reports and repairs focused on the skin, ignoring the real problem, the underlying structural masonry, which holds up the skin and is unstable. Ms. Vacca stated that she was the first engineer to inspect the backup masonry and really understand that structural failure of the towers.
- Mr. Detwiler asked why the building was never repaired.
 - Mr. Coggin explained that the former owner was not willing to spend the money to repair the building.
 - Mr. Detwiler asked why the current owner did not address the problem immediately.
 - Mr. McClure stated that the owner did and this review is the result of that effort. He also noted that there was a development project that might have saved the building, but it was stuck in litigation for three years from 2016 to 2019 as some community members tried to stop the project. The earlier project was delayed by some neighbors. Mr. McClure stated that the current owner began investigating the building’s problems as soon as he purchased the building. No bank would ever lend millions of dollars in these conditions to try to stabilize this building. He stated that the current owner bought the building for \$50,000 because the designation of a building that cannot be saved drove the price down to nothing. The building is in imminent danger of collapse. The people who would be impacted by a collapse want it demolished.
 - Mr. Detwiler stated that the owner should provide a plan to retain most of the building or reconstruct it. He stated that such a plan should have been presented.
 - Mr. McClure stated that the towers must be demolished because they present an imminent danger of collapse. Art work and stained glass windows will be salvaged, but the towers must be demolished.
- Mr. McCoubrey stated that the towers may be able to be partially demolished and reconstructed. He stated that the Committee has not been presented with real demolition plans. He stated that it may be able to be demolished from the north, street side, not the south, sanctuary side.
 - Mr. McClure stated that he has presented significant testimony on those questions from engineers and also has the City’s opinion. He offered to present more testimony. He added that he could submit a strong financial hardship application, but that would do nothing but add delay in addressing the dangerous conditions. He stated that it is obvious given this property’s history that there is no reasonable adaptive reuse of this building given its condition. The towers must be demolished from the south as confirmed by the Department of Licenses & Inspections and its independent engineer. He stated that his client is willing to discuss trying to save parts of the building, but that will have to happen during the demolition planning.

- Mr. McCoubrey stated that the engineers should have addressed the conditions of both towers, not just one.
- Ms. Vacca responded that there are many through cracks in both of the towers. She stated that most, if not all, of the through cracks visible on the exterior of both towers are through cracks. She stated that she has never before seen severe cracks like this in a masonry building.
- Mr. Coggin agreed. He pointed to photographs in Ms. Vacca's report showing cracks in both towers. He noted that Commissioner Perri and his engineer observed this cracking. All of the engineers understand that this is structural cracking.
- Ms. Vacca added that the walls are displaced out of plane at the cracks. The towers are moving out to the north.
- Ms. Gutterman asked if the movement was the result of the traffic in the street.
- Ms. Vacca stated that the traffic has nothing to do with it. The movement results from the degradation of the mortar in the backup masonry.
- Mr. Coggin noted that earlier reports have commented on the structural instability of the towers. Mr. Coggin stated that two laser surveys indicated no movement between them, yet stone continued to fall.
- Mr. McCoubrey stated that the face stone and backup masonry are two different systems with different problems.
- Ms. Vacca stated that the façade brownstone cannot be anchored back to the structural masonry because the structural masonry is in such poor condition. The Façade stone should be removed, but removing it may cause a collapse of the backup stone.
- Mr. Coggin stated that the veneer stone is allowing water to infiltrate the walls and freeze/thaw cycles are pushing the veneer stone off. However, the water has also damaged the backup stone, deteriorating its mortar. The backup stone is not bonded to the mortar.
- Mr. D'Alessandro agreed that it is not possible to reattach the veneer to the backup stone because the backup stone has failed. Moreover, using a hammer drill might cause a collapse. Mr. D'Alessandro, the preservation contractor on the Architectural Committee, stated that he would not put someone in a tower to work on it. It is too dangerous. He stated that a contractor working on the tower may trigger a collapse. He stated that you could not inject grout into the backup masonry. Any pressure would cause the wall "to blow up on you." Mr. D'Alessandro stated that the backup masonry cannot be repaired. He agreed with Ms. Vacca that there is no way to repair the towers in place. The towers would need to be demolished and reconstructed. He stated that it is not possible to repair them. Any pressure from grout injection would cause the towers to collapse. Mr. D'Alessandro stated that simply drilling a hole in the masonry could cause a tower to collapse. He stated that it would not be safe to work on these towers. He listed several reasons why it would not be safe to work in these towers. Mr. D'Alessandro concluded that the towers must be demolished. They might be able to be rebuilt, but they must be demolished first.
- Mr. Angelides, an economic consultant, stated that he analyzed the project as though there were no time constraints. He determined whether it would make economic sense to stabilize and repair the building if there were no need to act immediately and if the towers could be accessed from the north, not through the building from the south. He observed that it would not make economic sense to stabilize the building, remove the towers, and reuse the building. He stated that this is not a full hardship analysis, but instead a limited, hardship-like analysis. The

demolition of the towers from the north would cost at least \$2 million, maybe much more. Stabilizing the remainder of the building would cost more than \$1 million. Then the building would need to be rehabilitated for the new use like 25 apartments. It would cost \$3 million just to stabilize the building, before any rehabilitation. The apartments that would result would be compromised, owing to the constraints of the building. The units would be less attractive than comparably sized new units, and therefore produce less income. There is no space for onsite parking. Rehabilitating an old building for a new use is already expensive. The reuse of this building is not economically feasible. “The juice is not worth the squeeze.” To rebuild the towers would make the financial hole that much deeper. Old estimates to rebuild the towers are \$2 million. It would cost more today. Any requirement to rebuild the towers would make a financially infeasible project even more infeasible. Tax credits and other assistance would not offset the costs. Residential is the only feasible reuse at this site. Additional costs for supporting additional walls for reuse would merely add to the sunk costs. No bank would ever finance a project like the reuse of this church, given the investments needed to stabilize and the inferior apartments that would result. No one would take on this project. Mr. Angelides concluded that he is very confident that this building cannot be feasibly reused. He acknowledged that he had not completed a full hardship analysis, but noted that the conclusion of such an analysis is very clear. The up-front costs to partially demolish and stabilize are too great.

- Ms. Gutterman noted the 1730 Wharton Street application reviewed earlier today shows that churches can be reused.
 - Mr. Detwiler agreed.
 - Matt McClure asked Mr. Angelides to judge the feasibility of reuse of the church assuming that the apartments would attract the highest possible rents, to which Mr. Angelides responded that the project would be financially infeasible even with the best possible rents. The enormous expense of stabilizing the building renders any subsequent project in the building financially infeasible. Two dozen units cannot offset the high costs to stabilize. He added that his analysis ignores the real-world constraints.
- Ms. Stein asked why the applicants did not provide options, like disassembly of the towers from the north.
 - Mr. McClure stated that the condition of the building is driving the application. He asserted that an application like this would never have been heard by the Historical Commission in years past. The Commissioner of the Department of Licenses & Inspections would have ordered the demolition of the building without consulting the Commission. The Commissioner is giving the Historical Commission an opportunity to hear the application and offer advice, but the situation is dire and the condition needs to be addressed immediately. The situation dictated that the application would be limited.
 - Ms. Stein stated that she does not understand why the Architectural Committee is hearing the matter since there is only one option presented.
 - Mr. McClure stated that he is before the Committee today on the direction of the Department of Licenses & Inspections. The situation does not allow for the development of options. The dangerous condition must be addressed immediately.
- Mr. McCoubrey noted that the building is not classified as Imminently Dangerous by the Department of Licenses & Inspections.

- Mr. McClure suggested that the City may be reluctant to classify it as Imminently Dangerous because then the City may become responsible for demolishing it.
- Mr. Reuter, the Historical Commission's attorney, stated that the City would not necessarily unilaterally initiate a demolition if the building were classified as Imminently Dangerous. He stated that an Unsafe building can also pose a hazard. He concluded that the Commissioner's letter speaks for itself.
- Mr. D'Alessandro stated that the towers should be demolished to the watertable.
 - Mr. McClure noted that the engineers and Commissioners have all agreed that demolition needs to proceed from the south. He asserted that the Historical Commission should not impose a condition that cannot be met, such as requiring demolition from the north, street side. He stated that the demolition planning must start now and demolition must be undertaken from the south. During the demolition planning, saving some portions of the building can be considered.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Paul Steinke of the Preservation Alliance stated that his organization retained Justin Spivey, an engineer. Mr. Steinke objected to Mr. McClure's comments about Mr. Spivey's direct contact with Commissioner Perri. Mr. Steinke summarized Mr. Spivey's testimony before the Historical Commission on this matter and noted that he said that the building is in good condition with "reserve strength." Mr. Steinke noted Mr. Spivey's July 17 letter to the Historical Commission.
- Mr. Spivey stated that he believes that there are alternatives to complete demolition. He stated that he has not changed the opinions expressed in his July 17 letter despite reading Commissioner Perri's letter and the accompanying Urban Engineers report. He acknowledged that he was incorrect about how the timber spires tie into the towers and appreciated the correction, but noted that that fact does not change his opinion. He asserted that his July 17 letter is an engineer's report. He also claimed that he did not lobby Commissioner Perri. He also claimed that he did not lobby for the designation of the building. He acknowledged that he has not been in the interior of the church. He said that the towers are still standing and have found a stable load path. He suggested that a stabilizing structural system should be erected before winter. Such a system is technically feasible and could be "done" faster than any demolition plan. Mr. Spivey discussed a photograph of the interior of the church and asked how salvage could be safely removed if the condition is as bad as the applicant claims. He suggested erecting stabilizing scaffolding as quickly as possible. Mr. Spivey discussed a church that he worked on in West Philadelphia, saving it despite its Imminently Dangerous condition. He discussed a photograph of a hospital in New York City and stated that it was stabilized. He stated that an engineer from the firm that undertook the hospital project concurred with his assessment that the towers at St. Laurentius could be stabilized with scaffolding. He discussed a photograph of the Mt. Moriah Cemetery gatehouse. He said that precast concrete structures can be used to brace a structure. He discussed a building in New York with a structural system constructed outside the building. Scaffolding can be obtained and erected quickly and can provide temporary lateral bracing. The towers could be braced, partially deconstructed, and rebuilt. He discussed St. Ann's in Waterbury, Connecticut. He stated that it is possible to dismantle masonry towers and return a building to occupancy. He asserted that the towers could be dismantled and capped, or rebuilt in masonry or alternative materials. He stated that the towers can be dismantling without demolishing the entire church. Structural scaffolding should be erected. Demolishing the church is not the quickest or most responsible

option. Structural scaffolding should be erected. Mr. Spivey stated that the towers are not moving; they are not in a state of imminent collapse. He stated that the new pointing repairs done in 2019 have not cracked. The structure can remain standing if structural scaffolding is installed before winter. He stated that he agrees with the Urban Engineers report, which indicates that the towers can be stabilized.

- Mr. Steinke attempted to offer more testimony, but Mr. D'Alessandro noted that he already had a chance to speak and that his testimony was repetitive.
- Jeanne Curtis, an interior designer, stated that she has been involved in research and academic study of the church. She discussed her research at length. She suggested that all alternatives be considered. She offered her research.
 - Mr. McCoubrey stopped Ms. Curtis, stating that she has exceeded her three-minute time limit by quite a bit.
- Mr. Farnham asked the members of the public to limit their comments to the matters at hand: the structural condition of the building, whether it must be demolished or can be repaired, whether sections of the building can be retained, whether salvage is feasible, whether it must be demolished from the south, whether reuse is feasible, and whether demolition is necessary in the public interest. He stated that the historical, architectural, and cultural significance of the building are givens; the Historical Commission has already made that decision. Earlier project, the zoning of the site, how it was purchased, dust, noise, and safety during any demolition are all irrelevant.
- Attorney Hal Schirmer asked if the Committee was provided with his photographs. He stated that he was involved in the designation and the appeal of the zoning. He noted that the Archdiocese deconstructed and reconstructed towers at St. John the Evangelist. It cost \$1.2 million. He suggested installing cellphone antennas on the reconstructed towers at St. Laurentius. He noted that the towers on the Church of the Assumption are dangerous and have not fallen. He asserted that they will never fall down.
 - Mr. McCoubrey told Mr. Schirmer that his time was up. Mr. Schirmer kept talking, discussing agreements made by the Archdiocese and Holy Name Parish in 2016. He asked why the owner or buyer did not repair the property. He discussed the zoning appeal and the later rezoning. Mr. McCoubrey stated that Mr. Schirmer's testimony was not on point. Mr. Schirmer kept talking. Eventually, the Zoom meeting manager muted him.
- Mason Carter claimed that structural and hardship issues have been confused. He suggesting looking at buildings in Europe, where they are building structural frames to support buildings. He stated that only demolition has been considered.
- Oscar Beisert said that reviewing this application at the Historical Commission first was a "flawed and reckless action." He suggested an overbuild. He asked why the owner has not tried to sell the building. He asked about other options. He asserted that the regulation of this building is not a taking.
- Dana Fedeli opposed the demolition of the church. She stated that the building is not Imminently Dangerous. She suggested stabilization. The letter from Commissioner Perri and his engineer should be disregarded because they provide no new information. The owner wants to demolish for the open lot. The owner has failed to repair the building. The owner wants profit. She referred to Mr. McClure's "history of toxic conduct." She stated that Mr. McClure is a bully.
 - Mr. McCoubrey told Ms. Fedeli that her time was up. Ms. Fedeli tried to scream over Mr. McCoubrey. Ms. Fedeli kept talking, despite additional time and warnings from the chair.

- Attorney Michael Mattioni stated that he represents the Holy Name of Jesus Parish and the St. Laurentius School. He stated that his clients support the recommendations of Commissioner Perri and his engineer. His clients are concerned about public safety and the ability of the school to operate safely. He asked for prompt action to abate the safety hazard. He stated that he is involved in the project to relocate the windows and murals from the church for preservation. He stated that the salvage effort will begin about August 10. The school is scheduled to open in September and wants assurances that public safety will be protected.
- Mary McGettigan of West Philadelphians for Planning & Preservation asked if this is a case of demolition by neglect. She stated that there has been intentional neglect. She stated that the former and current owners are guilty of demolition by neglect and should be forced to repair the building. She noted that the Historical Commission ordered the demolition of 107 Chestnut Street last month, but no work has been done. There is no emergency. Mr. McClure is histrionic. A demolition permit in this case would not be in the public's interest.
- John Scott, a long-term resident of Fishtown, stated that the building is not Imminently Dangerous, and therefore there is no emergency. He noted that the owner has not braced the building, closed the streets, or taken any other actions to protect public safety. He quoted from the Urban Engineers report on bracing. He suggested that the Committee consider the differences between bracing for demolition and bracing for repair.
- Kevin Brett stated that this is a case of demolition by neglect. He discussed a transfer tax document and an engineer's report and questioned whether the current owner had knowledge of the engineer's report. He suggested that the City pursue this case like it pursued the Edward Corner case. He stated that this is "appalling" and a "charade."
- Mr. McCoubrey stated that the public comment period is closed.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION:

- Mr. McClure stated that his client has taken many steps evidencing his original intent to reuse the building.
- Ms. Vacca disputed Mr. Spivey's testimony. She stated that situation at St. Ann's was very different from that at St. Laurentius. Ms. Vacca stated that the structural scaffolding that Mr. Spivey recommends will not stop a catastrophic collapse at St. Laurentius. Typical scaffolding like that recommended by Mr. Spivey cannot support the towers. Structural steel with large bracing might support the towers, but not the scaffolding that Mr. Spivey described. Ms. Vacca stated that there is a potential for collapse that cannot be addressed by scaffolding. She stated that everyone agrees that the towers are in extremely poor structural condition and must be demolished. No one is saying that they can be repaired in place. She stated that stabilization cannot be achieved with scaffolding.
- Mr. Coggin disputed Mr. Spivey's claim that there are no new cracks where repairs were undertaken. He disagreed. Mr. Coggin stated that no movement in the towers does not indicate that a collapse will not occur. The building is imminently dangerous. No one knows when stone will fail from the towers. He stated that the only way to safely demolish the tower is to demolish from the south. He also noted that \$500,000 was spent trying to repair the St. Ann's tower before it was demolished. Mr. Coggin stated that St. Ann's was in better condition than St. Laurentius, based on photographs he reviewed. Mr. Coggin observed that the Renwick Hospital that Mr. Spivey referenced was his company's project. He noted

- that they collapsed some of the building inward before beginning the repairs. It is also a very different type of structure and the project ran out of money. Finally, Mr. Coggin stated that the Spring Street, New York project referenced by Mr. Spivey was very different from St. Laurentius. It is in no way analogous to the current situation.
- Mr. McClure stated that his client bought the property in January and immediately started working with engineers. All three engineers and the Department of Licenses & Inspections are providing the same advice.
 - Mr. McCoubrey stated that the building should be immediately stabilized and then a discussion about its future initiated.
 - Mr. D'Alessandro stated that it is clear that the towers are dangerous and cannot be stabilized. The towers must be demolished to the watertable. He stated that he is not yet convinced that the demolition needs to start from the south. He again stated that the towers must be demolished to the watertable.
 - Mr. Detwiler stated that he is not convinced that anything but the towers needs to be demolished. He is not convinced that the remainder of the church needs to be demolished.
 - Ms. Gutterman agreed with Mr. Detwiler regarding the need to demolish the towers, but not the sanctuary.
 - Mr. D'Alessandro stated that the demolition of the towers could happen in phases, demolishing first to the bell tower platform level.
 - Mr. McCoubrey stated that the towers should be demolished without additional demolition and then the situation should be reevaluated.
 - Mr. D'Alessandro rejected Mr. Detwiler's idea to lift the spires with a crane.
 - Mr. McCoubrey again suggested stabilization first.
 - Ms. Gutterman stated that the applicant should have presented options to the Architectural Committee.
 - Ms. Gutterman suggested a motion that denied complete demolition with further studies to determine how the towers can be stabilized, dismantled, repaired, and reconstructed to maintain the important structure.
 - Mr. Farnham stated that the Committee should not place conditions on a denial, but should recommend approval, approval with conditions, denial, or tabling.
 - Mr. Reuter stated that a recommendation for denial could include suggestions for the applicant.
 - Mr. Detwiler noted that the Committee is advisory only.
 - Ms. Gutterman stated that she would amend her motion and recommend denial of the demolition of the full church in order to be able to demolish or dismantle the towers.

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Architectural Committee voted to recommend denial.

ITEM: 1600-06 E. Berks St
MOTION: Denial
MOVED BY: Gutterman
SECONDED BY: D'Alessandro

VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Dan McCoubrey	X				
John Cluver					X
Rudy D'Alessandro	X				
Justin Detwiler	X				
Nan Gutterman	X				
Suzanne Pentz					X
Amy Stein	X				
Total	5				2

ADJOURNMENT

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN AUDIO RECORDING: 07:32:40

The Architectural Committee adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Minutes of the Architectural Committee are presented in action format. Additional information is available in the audio recording for this meeting. The start time for each agenda item in the recording is noted.
- Application materials and staff overviews are available on the Historical Commission's website, www.phila.gov/historical.

**THE MINUTES OF THE 696TH STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**FRIDAY, 14 AUGUST 2020
REMOTE MEETING ON ZOOM
ROBERT THOMAS, CHAIR**

CALL TO ORDER

START TIME IN ZOOM RECORDING: 00:00:00

Mr. Thomas, the Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and announced the presence of a quorum. The following Commissioners joined him:

Commissioner	Present	Absent	Comment
Robert Thomas, AIA, Chair	X		
Emily Cooperman, Ph.D., Committee on Historic Designation Chair	X		
Mark Dodds (Division of Housing & Community Development)	X		
Kelly Edwards, MUP	X		
Steven Hartner (Department of Public Property)	X		
Labaron Lenard-Palmer (Dept. of Planning & Development)	X		
Josh Lippert (Department of Licenses & Inspections)	X		
John Mattioni, Esq.	X		
Dan McCoubrey, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, Architectural Committee Chair	X		
Jessica Sánchez, Esq. (City Council President)	X		
H. Ahada Stanford, Ph.D. (Commerce Department)	X		
Betty Turner, MA, Vice Chair	X		
Kimberly Washington, Esq.	X		

Owing to public health concerns surrounding the COVID-19 virus, all Commissioners, staff, applicants, and public attendees participated in the meeting remotely via Zoom video and audio-conferencing software.

The following staff members were present:

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
Kim Chantry, Historic Preservation Planner II
Laura DiPasquale, Historic Preservation Planner II
Shannon Garrison, Historic Preservation Planner I
Meredith Keller, Historic Preservation Planner II
Allyson Mehley, Historic Preservation Planner II
Leonard Reuter, Esq., Law Department
Megan Cross Schmitt, Historic Preservation Planner II

The following persons attended the online meeting:

Marlene Schleifer
David Traub

ITEM: 4649 Umbria St MOTION: Designate; Criteria I and J MOVED BY: Cooperman SECONDED BY: Turner					
VOTE					
Commissioner	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Thomas, Chair	X				
Cooperman	X				
Dodds (DHCD)	X				
Edwards	X				
Hartner (DPP)	X				
Lenard-Palmer (DPD)	X				
Perri (L&I)	X				
Mattioni	X				
McCoubrey	X				
Sánchez (Council)	X				
Stanford (Commerce)	X				
Turner, Vice Chair	X				
Washington	X				
Total	13				

EMERGENCY MATTERS

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, jon.farnham@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This application proposes the complete demolition of the former St. Laurentius church building at 1600-06 E. Berks Street. Section 14-1005(6)(d) of the historic preservation ordinance stipulates that:

No building permit shall be issued for the demolition of a historic building ... unless the Historical Commission finds that issuance of the building permit is necessary in the public interest, or unless the Historical Commission finds that the building ... cannot be used for any purpose for which it is or may be reasonably adapted.

This application contends that the Historical Commission should approve the demolition as necessary in the public interest to abate a dangerous condition that poses a threat to public safety. The Department of Licenses & Inspections declared the building Unsafe in April 2015. The Historical Commission designated it in July 2015 over the objections of the owner, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, who claimed that the building was in very poor condition and repairing it would be a hardship. A current owner purchased the church in January 2020.

In June 2020, the owner submitted an engineer's report to the Historical Commission and Department of Licenses & Inspections that indicates that the two towers are failing and pose a public safety hazard. In response to the report, the L&I Commissioner requested that the property owner provide a second engineer's report from an independent, qualified structural engineer. The second report was submitted in early July. It concurs with the findings of the first report and also provides a detailed history of the many recent engineering analyses of the building. After the second report confirmed the findings of the first, the L&I Commissioner requested that the Historical Commission consider the application on an expedited basis at its July 10 monthly meeting, without referral to the Architectural Committee, owing to a need to address the public safety concerns immediately. On July 9, the Commissioner of the Department of Licenses & Inspections sent a letter to the Historical Commission explaining his request. The letter indicates that the danger posed by the building must be abated as soon as possible, especially before students return to the adjacent school and freeze/thaw cycles begin.

The Historical Commission considered the application at its July 10 meeting and after a lengthy presentation by the applicant, considerable debate by the Commissioners, and extensive public comment, the Commission voted to refer the application to the Architectural Committee for a recommendation.

Owing to the public safety hazard posed by the towers and the Historical Commission's decision to delay a decision to its meeting on August 14, the L&I Commissioner retained an independent engineer to evaluate the building. The Commissioner and the engineer inspected the building on July 24 and the Commissioner issued a letter with the engineer's report to the Historical Commission on July 27.

The Commissioner's letter contends that the Historical Commission should approve the demolition of both towers and that the demolition should be undertaken from the rear, through the sanctuary. He also states that structural bracing or scaffolding of the towers is not a practical alternative to removing the towers. He concludes that the focus should be on saving portions of the building for incorporation into a new building. While discussing his latest letter with the Historical Commission's staff, the Commissioner indicated that the north or front façade along Berks Street and the east or side façade along Memphis Street might be able to be saved and incorporated into a new building, but the rest of the church will need to be demolished to get to the towers from the south or rear along Wilt Street. The Commissioner states in his letter that owing to the tight dimensions of the site, adjacent buildings and narrow streets, the safest and most practical method to demolish the two towers is to stage the demolition from the south side. This approach however necessitates substantial demolition of the former sanctuary.

The Department of Licenses & Inspections is the City agency with the expertise and authority to determine when buildings poses threats to public safety. The Department has determined that this church building poses a hazard to public safety and that the hazard must be abated quickly with the demolition of the towers. The Historical Commission should accept the Department's determination on its face. The task before the Historical Commission and Architectural Committee is to determine whether there are reasonable alternatives when demolishing that might save some of the building while protecting public health, safety, and welfare. The Historical Commission and Architectural Committee should accept the Commissioner's assertion that the Historical Commission should approve the demolition of both towers and that the demolition should be undertaken from the rear, through the sanctuary.

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Architectural Committee voted to recommend denial.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 03:51:20

RECUSAL:

- Mr. Mattioni recused, owing to his law firm's representation of Holy Name Parish and St. Laurentius School, which have an agreement to salvage elements from the interior.

PRESENTERS:

- Mr. Farnham presented the application to the Historical Commission. Mr. Farnham noted that Commissioner Perri of the Department of Licenses & Inspections is attending the meeting, taking his seat on the Historical Commission. He asked everyone to be respectful of the Commissioner's time, owing to other commitments he has later in the afternoon.
- Attorney Matt McClure, engineers Jan Vacca and Mark Coggin, and consultant Peter Angelides represented the property owner.

DISCUSSION:

- Mr. Farnham noted that, during its previous reviews of this application, the Historical Commission and Architectural Committee accepted lengthy oral testimony as well as many written comments from numerous members of the public. He noted that much of that testimony was unrelated to the review of the application. He suggested that, when taking public testimony today, the Historical Commission apply Section 4.6.b of the Rules & Regulations, which states that "the Chair may impose reasonable limitations upon public participation to ensure relevance and to avoid excessive repetition," and limit public input today to the matters at hand such as the structural stability of the building, methods for abating the unsafe conditions with demolition and/or stabilization, the necessity or lack thereof of complete or partial demolition, the means and methods of removing and/or repairing the towers, and the feasibility, financial and otherwise, of the means of abatement. He noted that public comment is limited to three minutes per person and the staff will act as timekeeper during the review. Mr. Farnham explained that he had received an email from Hall Schirmer approximately 20 minutes ago, at 12:37 p.m., with eight attached files totaling 7MB commenting on today's application. He stated that he forwarded the email to the members of the Historical Commission. He opined that the submission fails to satisfy Section 4.6.b of the Rules & Regulations, which states that substantial testimony must be submitted seven calendar days before the meeting. He stated that there is no way for the Commissioners to digest that much material during the review. He stated that, in his opinion, the materials could be ignored because their submission fails to satisfy Section 4.6.b.
- Mr. McClure noted that the Historical Commission's minutes from the designation of the property indicate that Commissioner Cooperman was involved with the nomination and may be considered part of the nominating team. Mr. McClure observed that the nomination and nominators opined at the time of the designation on the structural condition of the building. He asserted that their statements at that time on the condition were false. He observed that Justin Spivey, who has been retained by the Preservation Alliance in the current matter, was also part of the nominating team and opined on the condition of the building at the time that it was

designated. He asked if it is appropriate for Ms. Cooperman, who served on the nominating team and opined on the condition of the building, to now sit in judgment of an application which makes claims about the condition of the building. Mr. McClure objected to Commissioner Cooperman's participation in the review. He stated that it is as if he represented a client at court and then sat on the appellate panel that reviewed the case. He stated that he is not alleging any violation of the code or ethics, but is claiming that there is the potential for bias.

- Leonard Reuter, the Historical Commission's attorney, explained that he vetted the issue with the City's Board of Ethics. He stated that the Board's attorney concluded that participating in the review would not violate local or state ethics rules, which are predicated on financial interests. He stated that participation would not violate ethics laws or rules. He stated that disclosure and recusal are not required in this case. He noted that he has requested a public opinion on this matter, but it has not yet been completed. He noted that Mr. McClure is not raising this as a matter of propriety and not the law, in which case Ms. Cooperman is able to make her own decision.
- Ms. Cooper stated that she was not a member of the "team." She stated that she did not work on the nomination, but instead wrote a letter regarding how the church satisfied the Criteria for Designation. She stated that she did not participate in any evaluation of the condition of the building. She stated that she was paid for the preparation of the letter.
- Mr. Reuter added that, even if Ms. Cooperman had worked on the nomination for compensation, participating in today's review would not constitute a conflict under the City's or state's ethics rules. He noted that the Commissioner no longer works for the company that prepared the letter.
- David Perri, the Commissioner of the Department of Licenses & Inspections and a member of the Historical Commission, stated that the towers are unsafe and the deconstruction of the towers down to a safe level must begin as soon as possible. He recounted the recent history of the building. In June, engineers produced a report that recommended demolition of the two towers. He noted that, upon receipt of the report, he met with the engineers and staff of the Historical Commission and Law Department to investigate. He learned that the engineers recommended approaching the demolition of the towers from the south, through the sanctuary. He stated that he asked the property to retain another engineer for a second opinion. The second engineer produced a report dated 2 July 2020, which confirmed the findings of the first. The Department then hired its own consultant to consider the condition of the towers and the demolition sequencing. On 24 July 2020, Mr. Perri, his chief of emergency services, and the Department's independent engineer inspected the building. He stated that they confirmed that the brownstone cladding of the towers is not the problem. The structural schist backup stone is the problem. It is fractured and leaning by as much as two inches. The towers depend on the bond between the rubble stone and mortar and the mortar continues to deteriorate. The Department and its independent engineer agree with the owner's engineers that the two towers must be deconstructed as soon as possible to mitigate risk. The safest and most practical staging area and the possible fall zone are to the south, where the sanctuary is located. Mr. Perri noted, however, that the entire building does not need to be demolished to demolish the towers. He asserted that the main or Berks Street elevation should be saved and reused as part of a new development. Mr. Perri concluded that the Department recommends to the Historical Commission that it approve the demolition of the two towers to the watertable and the selective

- demolition of the remainder of the building as needed for the safe staging and demolition of the towers. At a minimum, the façade along Berks Street up to the gable should be retained and reused in any future building. The demolition and retention of building elements should be determined in consultation with the Department and the Historical Commission's staff. He emphasized that the towers must be deconstructed immediately for reasons of public safety. He stated that the Historical Commission must approve the demolition of the tower, but the Berks Street façade and perhaps the Memphis Street façade should be retained.
- Mr. McCoubrey stated that the Architectural Committee unanimously concurred that the towers need to be demolished to the watertable. He explained that the Committee questioned the need to demolish the entire church to remove the towers. He asked if the demolition could be approached from the north, not the south. He asked if a demolition expert has been engaged. He asked for options to total demolition. He asked for a plan for the demolition sequencing.
 - Mr. Perri stated that the streets are narrow and the adjacent buildings are close. The church has no setback from the street. It is in a tight rowhouse environment. There is not enough room for a real collapse zone. He stated that his engineer agreed that demolition would need to proceed from the south, perhaps resulting in the demolition of the south and west walls and the roof. He stated that the front façade may need to be braced.
 - Mr. Thomas agreed with Mr. Perri's conclusions and approach.
 - Mr. McClure stated that he raised the issue about Ms. Cooperman because he had to preserve the argument, but added that he accepts Ms. Cooperman's statements and conclusion. He stated that he will not repeat his experts' testimony from the early meetings. Mr. McClure stated that his team has conferred with JPC, a noted demolition contractor, for advice on the demolition. He stated that everyone agrees that the fall zone must be to the south. He stated that it will delay the demolition by several months to require bracing of the front façade. He stated that protecting the front façade during demolition will require "substantial" bracing. Mr. McClure stated that it is impossible to have an iterative discussion between engineers at a virtual, public meeting. He suggested that the Historical Commission approve the application with the owner's engineers to work out the details with the Department and the Historical Commission's staff. He stated that his client is willing to try to save and salvage portions of the building, but noted that exigency is the issue, that exigency is limiting options. Mr. McClure stated that he reserves the right to file a financial hardship application; he noted that he did not file one because it takes months to prepare and time is of the essence. Mr. McClure questioned the submission of the engineering plan to stabilize the building by the Preservation Alliance at 4:30 p.m. of the afternoon before the meeting. He noted the seven-day rule and commented that the submission is clearly late, especially in light of the fact that the Historical Commission first heard the application over one month ago.
 - Ms. Vacca, structural engineer, introduced herself and reminded everyone that she had prepared a report on the condition of the building in June 2020. She reported that she met with the JPC Group, a demolition contractor, at the site on 3 August 2020. They inspected the church inside and out, including up into the towers. She stated that JPC is known for taking on complicated demolitions at urban sites and is certified by the City. She stated that the representatives of JPC said that the building is in the worst condition of any building they have inspected. They are concerned about failure of the structure, owing to the condition of the backup masonry, especially the mortar. They are worried about a collapse during demolition. She

- stated that nothing can be anchored to the towers during demolition. The JPC representatives stated that they may not allow any workers into the interior of the towers, owing to the dangerous conditions. They are also concerned about stabilizing the front façade on Berks Street. She stated that the stained glass windows should not be removed from the towers or front gable because the frames are providing some support. The JPC representatives stated that they would “harness” the towers so that any debris or collapse would be directed to the south. She stated that they would not attach to the towers, but would harness them. She stated that it would take four to six months to design and install bracing for the front gable. Ms. Vacca stated that she does not see any way to save any of the church in place. It will crumble when the demolition begins. The JPC representatives stated that they would want to demolish the church by hand from a crane, rather than from scaffolding. She stated again that nothing can be attached to the church. Ms. Vacca stated that the towers would be wrapped so that, if they fell, they would fall to the south. She stated that the design for that wrapping has not been undertaken.
- Mr. McClure asked Ms. Vacca to opine on the Plan B design to stabilize the towers. Ms. Vacca noted that the Plan B designers had not been in the church. She stated that there is no way to stabilize the towers in any sort of a permanent way with scaffolding. She stated that the Plan B scaffolding will not hold the towers during a collapse. She stated that the Plan B fall zone is insufficient. The fall zone should have a 135-foot radius.
 - Ms. Vacca stated that debris will fall to the south. Therefore, the remainder of the church likely cannot be saved. She again stressed the very poor condition of the building. She also stressed the need to be able to develop the demolition plan in conversation with the Department of Licenses & Inspections and the staff of the Historical Commission. Time is of the essence and will not allow an iterative approach with the Architectural Committee and Historical Commission. Salvaging could be discussed during the demolition planning.
 - Mr. Coggin, another structural engineer retained by the property owner, stated that he has worked with Plan B in the past, but noted that there are flaws in their plan for stabilizing the towers, likely because they have not been in the building. He stated that normal pipe and tube scaffolding is not capable of supporting an uncontrolled collapse. Mr. Coggin stated that the scaffolding would fall if a collapse occurred. He stated that the scaffolding should not connect to the walls. He concluded that the Plan B scheme is not feasible. Mr. Coggin stated that the gable end is not tied back to the trusses. He stated that removal of the towers may result in a failure of the gable wall. The gable wall could begin to collapse above the windows and then fail all the way down to the watertable. Mr. Coggin stated that questions about the demolition could be resolved by working with the Department of Licenses & Inspections.
 - Mr. Farnham noted that Commissioner Stanford left the meeting at 1:00 p.m.
 - Mr. Perri asked Mr. McClure if the owner would commit to reconstructing the Berks Street gabled façade to its historic condition if it was damaged or removed during the demolition.
 - Mr. McClure stated that he can agree to salvaging materials and reusing them in a new building. When a new building is built at the site, it can be a homage to the historic church. However, we cannot commit to rebuilding the front façade because we have no idea what the financial implications would be and whether reconstruction would be economically viable.

- Mr. Coggin stated that some but not all of the brownstone may be able to be reused.
- Mr. McClure stated that they are committed to working with the Historical Commission on any new design as long as the property is listed on the Philadelphia Register.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Paul Steinke of the Preservation Alliance stated that he retained Plan B to prepare the stabilization plan after the Architectural Committee meeting on 28 July 2020. He stated that he pondered requesting access to the building, but was pessimistic that it would be granted. Therefore, he did not request access to the building for his engineers. He noted, however, that they would accept access to the building if offered. He asked if the building can be made safe without demolishing it. He stated that demolition is an extreme approach. He claimed that the owner's engineers have not asserted that the entire building must be demolished. Mr. Steinke stated that the property can be stabilized and made safe, without demolition.
- Justin Spivey stated that he did not testify on the condition of the building when it was designated in 2015. He acknowledged that the building has been declared Unsafe, but he observed that it is not currently considered Imminently Dangerous. He asserted that it can be made safe. He stated that the exterior of the church can be scaffolded and the interior can be shored to prevent a collapse. He added that the scaffolding would not attach to the building, but would be in close contact. He stated that the towers will collapse downward, not outward. The Plan B fall zone is correct; the applicants' is not. He stated that stabilization should begin quickly. He noted that the towers have not yet collapsed. He asserted that the demolition to the south is not the only option. He stated that Plan B's scheme can be installed quickly and can provide time for additional investigation. He described Plan B's scheme as an exoskeleton around the towers. Stabilization is feasible and responsible. It will allow time for less destructive alternatives.
- Phillip Rennie of Plan B Engineering stated that his company specializes in stabilizing fragile buildings. He stated that the demolition of these towers should not be uncontrolled, owing to the nearby buildings. He asserted that the applicants were planning an uncontrolled demolition. He contended that they planned to push the towers into the sanctuary to the south. He objected to such a plan. He stated that the houses should be evacuated and the electrical lines moved before any demolition takes place. The safe zone should be secured and monitored. He stated that platforms should be built over the nearby houses and streets. He said that a self-supporting scaffolding structure can be erected to cradle the towers. The towers should be shored from the interior. Portions of the building may need to be removed. Once the towers are stabilized, they can be inspected to see if they can be repaired or need to be demolished.
- Paul Steinke asked to allow Guy Laren and Vivek Tomer to speak. Both were unmuted to speak, but neither responded. The Commission's Zoom administrator called upon them several times to speak, but neither spoke. Mr. Steinke stated that Mr. Laren rehabilitated a church in West Philadelphia. Mr. Laren would also consider purchasing St. Laurentius. Mr. Steinke stated that Mr. Laren believes that he can feasibly rehabilitate the church.
- Andrew Miller, a neighbor, spoke of the dangers of demolition, and provided the 22nd and Market Street collapse as an example. He stated that the owner should stabilize the building.

- Dana Fedeli stated that the owner should post signs that alert people to the danger. She stated that the building is “a solid structure.” The Architectural Committee’s recommendation should be adopted.
- Mason Carter stated that this is a case of demolition by neglect. He supported the approach of the Preservation Alliance and engineer Justin Spivey.
- Kevin Brett stated that the applicant has not submitted “a code-compliant demolition plan.” Mr. Brett lodged many complaints about the owner’s behavior. He asserted that this is a case of demolition by neglect. He objected to demolition and asserted that the Historical Commission should require stabilization.
- Guy Laren explained that he renovated a church in West Philadelphia. He stated that he has never been in St. Laurentius but believes that there might be a way to save it.
- Jeanne Curtis tried to speak but experienced technical problems and was largely unintelligible. She stated that cell phone antennas and emergency services radio antennas should be installed on the church.
 - Several Commissioners stated that Ms. Curtis was largely unintelligible and what they could hear was not relevant.
- John Scott stated that he is a neighbor and a neighborhood representative. He stated that the neighbors support reuse. He claimed that the applicants are proposing an “uncontrolled demolition.” He claimed that no safety precautions are being taken. He asked the Historical Commission to deny the application in order to protect the public. He stated that the building should be stabilized.
- Jim Duffin stated that the complete demolition permit application should be denied. A partial demolition may be acceptable.
- Vivek Tomer stated that the complete demolition permit application should be denied. Stabilization or partial demolition should be required.
- Oscar Beisert recommended that the Historical Commission deny the demolition to compel the property owner to stabilize the building and then deconstruct and reconstruct the towers.
- Hal Schirmer stated that the towers should be rebuilt for cell phone antennas. He said that the towers at St. John the Evangelist were rebuilt. He claimed that insurance should cover all of the costs. He asserted that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia should pay for the repair. Mr. Schirmer discussed the zoning of the site. He stated that the towers should be hand-demolished and reconstructed.
- Venise Whitaker objected to any demolition. The “Philly Fishtown people” matter. She asked the Historical Commission to vote “No.”
- David Traub was unmuted, but never spoke. He was called upon several times, but never spoke.
- Mr. Farnham announced that the public comment period had ended.

DISCUSSION:

- Mr. Thomas invited the applicants to respond to the public comment.
- Ms. Vacca stated that Plan B’s scheme would not work with simple scaffolding, which could not resist the forces. She stated that holding up the building would require a very substantial steel structure with very substantial footings or foundations.
- Ms. Vacca stated that the applicants have never suggested that the demolition would be an uncontrolled demolition. Any claims that it would be are incorrect. She stated that they would design the demolition with safety as the first priority. She stated that they would have a plan in place during demolition in case the towers did collapse to ensure that they collapsed safely, but they are not intending to cause the towers to

collapse. She stated that scaffolding or girdling would be used to direct any unintended collapse to the south, but the demolition would be designed to avoid a collapse at all costs. She stated that she would never be a proponent of uncontrolled demolition.

- Ms. Vacca stated that she agrees with the City's engineer that the towers cannot be stabilized in the interior because there is very little access to masonry in the interior. She stated that she has not yet laid out a safety plan or a demolition plan. She stated that it is not feasible to build structural steel bracing for the towers. It would not be safe to place workers in the interior of the towers to attach the bracing.
- Ms. Vacca stated that she agreed with Mr. D'Alessandro, the contractor on the Architectural Committee, who asserted that the towers could not be stabilized in place, but had to be demolished.
 - Mr. Coggin added that Mr. D'Alessandro agreed that there is no way to tie the cladding to the backup stone and that the problems with the backup stone and its deteriorated mortar cannot be repaired in place.
- Mr. Coggin stated that they never suggested an uncontrolled demolition. They have always stated that the demolition would be controlled and would happen by hand.
- Mr. Coggin stated that the owner just took possession of the property this year. Claims of demolition by neglect are not viable.
- Mr. Coggin stated that no amount of additional study and no expenditure on stabilization will result in any other conclusion than the fact that the towers need to be demolished. The towers must be demolished to make them safe. Designing and installing scaffolding will take four to six months, during which time the building will remain at risk of collapse. Mr. Coggin also objected to Mr. Steinke's suggestion that the brownstone cladding could be removed and reinstalled. He stated that the primary problems are with the backup masonry, which has failed. The steeples must be removed and the towers must be demolished to make the building safe.
- Mr. Coggin stated that this building satisfies the definition of "Imminently Dangerous" in the Philadelphia Code. Ms. Vacca agreed.
- Mr. Thomas stated that, in his experience, scaffolding would not support these towers. Significant structural steel with large foundations would be required.
 - Ms. Vacca responded that there is no way to stabilize these towers in place. It is not possible. They must be demolished and could then be rebuilt. During the demolition of the towers, they will need to be harnessed so that an unexpected collapse can be directed. She concluded that scaffolding could not be used to harness or stabilize this building.
- Mr. Angelides, the applicant's economist, stated that nothing that Messrs. Laren and Tomer offered changed his mind about the economic viability of a rehabilitated St. Laurentius. He stated that they presented no cost information regarding the rehabilitation of St. Laurentius. He stated that they provided no comparisons between St. Laurentius and the church in West Philadelphia that Mr. Laren reused. Mr. Laren did not acknowledge that he has demolished historic buildings to flip properties. Mr. Laren was incorrect when he claimed that he had asked for entry into St. Laurentius; he never requested access to the building. Mr. Angelides stated that Mr. Rennie made no estimates of the costs to implement the Plan B scheme. Mr. Angelides stated that adding \$1 or \$2 million to stabilize and study St. Laurentius would make the project that much more expensive and that much less feasible.
 - Mr. Thomas stopped Mr. Angelides testimony, asserting that financial hardship is not relevant to today's discussion. Mr. McCoubrey agreed.

- Mr. McClure disagreed, arguing that feasibility determinations are central to the discussion. The Historical Commission cannot require an action like stabilization that is illusory. He asserted that financial information is relevant when reviewing necessary in the public interest applications. Exigency is the key in this situation. Mr. McClure stated that he could have submitted a financial hardship application, but it would have taken months to prepare. The hazard posed by the building does not allow for a many months-long process.
- Mr. McClure stated that the dangerous condition posed by the building must be abated immediately. He stated that Mr. Perri's suggestion that his engineers and demolition contractor work with the Department of Licenses & Inspections and the Historical Commission's staff to determine which parts of the building can be saved or salvaged is a reasonable one. He stated that he doubts that the Berks Street façade can be saved.
- Mr. Perri stated that the engineers retained by the Preservation Alliance mischaracterized the statement by the City's engineer, Urban Engineers, about the structural bracing that is needed before demolition. Mr. Perri read from the Urban Engineers report and stated that the bracing it recommends can be considered "belts and suspenders" for the demolition that would direct any unintended collapse during the demolition into the church building and away from the streets and other buildings. Mr. Perri then stated that the applicants have made this more difficult because they have refused to agree to preserve any part of the main façade of the building that means so much to the community. He stated that the applicants should do everything in their power to save building components that are meaningful to the community.
- Mr. Farnham noted for the record that Commissioner Washington left the meeting at 2:30 p.m.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The Historical Commission found that:

- The former St. Laurentius Church building is historically significant and important to the Fishtown community.
- The church building is Unsafe and poses an imminent threat to public health, safety, and welfare, owing to the possibility that the towers may collapse.
- The towers of the church building must be demolished to abate the danger. The towers cannot be feasibly stabilized or repaired in place.
- Other sections of the church building may need to be demolished to safely stage and undertake the demolition of the towers
- The Berks Street façade is the primary façade of the church building.

The Historical Commission concluded that:

- The demolition of the towers of the church building and the selective demolition of other sections of the building for the safe staging and demolition of the towers is necessary in the public interest, pursuant to Section 14-1005(6)(d) of the Philadelphia Code.

ACTION: Mr. Perri moved to approve the application as necessary in the public interest, provided the demolition is limited to the two towers above the watertable and other sections of the building as needed for the safe staging and demolition of the towers; and the façade along Berks Street up to the projected gable line is protected during the demolition or reconstructed in kind; with the demolition sequencing and preservation of other building elements to be

determined in consultation with the Department of Licenses & Inspections and the staff of the Historical Commission; pursuant to Section 14-1005(6)(d) of the Philadelphia Code. Mr. Hartner seconded the motion, which passed by a vote of 8 to 1, with one abstention.

ITEM: 1600-06 E Berks St MOTION: Approval with conditions MOVED BY: Perri SECONDED BY: Hartner					
VOTE					
Commissioner	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Thomas, Chair	X				
Cooperman	X				
Dodds (DHCD)	X				
Edwards			X		
Hartner (DPP)	X				
Lenard-Palmer (DPD)	X				
Perri (L&I)	X				
Mattioni				X	
McCoubrey	X				
Sánchez (Council)		X			
Stanford (Commerce)					X (departed meeting at 1:00 pm)
Turner, Vice Chair	X				
Washington					X (departed meeting at 2:30 pm)
Total	8	1	1	1	2