

**PUBLIC COMMENT ON
1600-06 E. BERKS STREET
APPLICATION**



September 11, 2025

Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: 1600 E. Berks Street (Former Site of St. Laurentius Church)

Dear Members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission,

Any commemorative effort at the former site of St. Laurentius Church must begin with robust community engagement and proactive outreach. It must extend beyond the wording of a marker to the overall form and scope of the initiative. Without such outreach, the project risks being perceived as perfunctory rather than restorative.

For this reason, RePoint Philadelphia urges the Commission to deny the current application and require the developer to return with a proposal shaped by meaningful community input.

While community dialogue must come first, the developer should remain open to enhancements such as a mural partnership with Philadelphia's renowned Mural Arts Program, a full-scale model of the church, and the documented attempted recovery of salvaged materials. These measures illustrate the kind of meaningful outcomes that could emerge from authentic consultation honoring both the community's loss and its enduring heritage.

Solicitations for community input have not been widely visible, and many residents with deep ties to St. Laurentius may not have had the opportunity to participate. Importantly, members of the Architectural Committee voiced concern, questioning why only the facade was represented and remarking that the effort felt more obligatory than heartfelt. This underscores the need for the Historical Commission to facilitate proactive community outreach, particularly given the many concessions that ultimately allowed full demolition of the church.

Community Outreach Recommendations

Given St. Laurentius's role as Philadelphia's first Polish-congregation Catholic church, outreach should intentionally include the following stakeholder communities:

- **St. Laurentius School community**, which continues to thrive next door;
- **Polish American Cultural Center** in Philadelphia;
- **National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa** in Doylestown, which houses St. Laurentius's stained-glass windows and recently hosted the widely attended 59th Annual Polish American Festival; and
- **Polish Catholic parish communities in neighboring Port Richmond**, especially St. John Paul II Parish, which carries forward Polish-language worship.

Engagement with these groups would not only ensure accuracy and authenticity, but also allow the broader Polish-American community to help shape how its heritage is remembered.

Assessment of the Proposed Memorial

The developer's proposal includes a bronze model of the church's front facade on a masonry base and a blue-and-gold style historical marker. At present, only the marker text has been identified for stakeholder coordination. Such

limited coordination is insufficient. The entire initiative should be shaped by consultation with stakeholder groups, including those noted above. The developer should remain open to alternatives or enhancements from this dialogue to ensure the final memorial is authentic and worthy of St. Laurentius's legacy.

Recommendations to Strengthen the Memorial

RePoint Philadelphia offers three proposals to ensure the memorial reflects the church's true importance:

1. **Depict the full church** – The entire structure was historically designated, and a partial model featuring only the front facade does not capture its magnitude or meaning.
2. **Recover and integrate salvaged materials** – Beyond the cornerstone and plaque, developers should be required to document sincere efforts to locate additional materials from the hand demolition process and incorporate them into the design. Communication with the demolition contractor should be pursued, documented, and verified (preferably in writing) to ensure that all reasonable opportunities to recover materials have been exhausted.
3. **Commission a mural along Memphis Street** – The long side wall of the planned rowhomes offers an extraordinary opportunity to partner with the **Philadelphia Mural Arts Program**, one of the city's greatest cultural resources. A large-scale mural would celebrate the Polish immigrant community that built St. Laurentius and provide the emotional and cultural resonance that a small architectural model alone cannot achieve.

Conclusion

RePoint urges the Commission to deny the current application and require the developer to undertake robust, intentional community engagement before any memorial is approved. That process should open the door to enhancements such as a full-scale representation of the church, documented salvage, and a mural partnership with Mural Arts Philadelphia. Taken together, these steps would move the project beyond a token gesture and create a powerful act of remembrance. Such a memorial would honor St. Laurentius as an architectural, cultural, and spiritual landmark. It would ensure the church's legacy endures in the life of the community.

Sincerely,



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On behalf of RePoint Philadelphia
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This testimony was prepared and submitted by RePoint Philadelphia Action, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization. The views expressed herein reflect the organization's mission to advocate for sound preservation policy and accountability in civic planning.