

Public Comment for 2147 and 2149 Ellsworth St

From: [Nathan Osburn](#)
To: [Alexander Till](#)
Subject: Re: Public Comment (written) for Historical Commission Committee on Historic Designation
Date: Wednesday, July 8, 2026 2:34:09 PM

Dear Philadelphia Historical Commission's Committee on Historic Designation:

Last August, I noticed that the We the Youth Keith Haring mural in my neighborhood of Point Breeze had fallen into disrepair and raised some funds along with several friends to help restore it, through a fundraising link from Mural Arts. We were hopeful that it might be restored by the 250th anniversary given the mural's title but I was also told it would likely take longer than that.

I'm hopeful that the recent historic designation nomination aligns with such efforts, and that the funds can soon be put to use.

Assuming that the Historic Designation will support the near-term restoration and long term maintenance of the mural, I want to voice my strong support for the nomination by Alexander Till.

In particular, it's clear that the mural is indeed a "material thing" of "aesthetic, cultural and historic value" that is "related to a specific setting and environment," as required. It's also clear that this collaborative mural has immense global value as the only one of its kind that remains in its original location in the entire United States, as the application attests.

In addition to the two criteria Till selected in the nomination...

[(a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; and,

(e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation]

... I believe that the mural also meets additional criteria:

(b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation - **the mural was intended to be celebrated as part of the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution and also Haring's art is strongly associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic (and subsequent efforts to address it)**

(f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation - **Haring's design is globally renowned and has become immediately recognizable to millions of people**

(h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City

(i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history

(j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community

Thank you for your consideration,

Nathan Osburn

Point Breeze resident



Save the Mural!

From Theresa Rose <theresa@rairphilly.org>

Date Wed 8/26/2026 1:57 PM

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

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Dear Jon,

Just writing as one of the many neighbors as well as Arts leaders in this City who want to save the Keith Haring Mural!

It would be heartbreaking if our city allowed one of the few surviving works by an artist of Haring's stature to disappear. Haring was born in Pennsylvania and came to Philadelphia to specifically create this work of art. The mural was created in 1987 as part of the Bicentennial celebration. Keith chose to do the mural in Point Breeze rather than Center City.

Some people say "move the mural." The site of this mural matters. The mural was conceived for this neighborhood and the wall. Its relationship to Point Breeze is of historical significance. Keith Haring worked on the mural on this site. We actually met him when he worked on it and that was a thrill.

Please consider the historic designation!

Best,
Theresa

Theresa Rose (she, her)
Managing Director
Recycled Artist In Residency

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Philadelphia, PA 19136

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From: [Tobia, Blaise](#)
To: [preservation](#)
Subject: Keith Haring Mural
Date: Thursday, August 27, 2026 9:45:51 PM

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I am writing in support of giving the Keith Haring mural in Point Breeze historic protection.

It epitomizes Haring's style and is this highly regarded artist's most important mural; the community-based nature of its production makes it even more valuable as a historic work of material culture. As Jane Golden has said, "Its survival tells a remarkable Philadelphia story. It has survived neighborhood change and development pressures. We [Mural Arts] restored it beautifully in 2013. A work intended to be ephemeral became permanent because the community cared to keep it alive."

The mural and the Neighborhood Gardens Trust-owned garden in front of the mural are an ensemble. The mural was conceived for this location.

The City of Philadelphia needs - and benefits from - this mural more than it will benefit from the development project that seeks to destroy it.

— Blaise Tobia

Professor Emeritus of Art & Art History
Drexel University

From: [Margaret Harris](#)
To: [preservation](#)
Cc: [Kenyatta Johnson](#); [Rue Landau](#); [Nikil Saval](#); [Ben Waxman](#)
Subject: Please save Keith Haring's We the People mural
Date: Thursday, August 27, 2026 10:01:37 PM

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To the members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission,

I am writing to ask you to save Keith Haring's We the People Mural in Point Breeze.

I write as a concerned citizen, Philadelphia voter, art lover, and community leader.

We need to preserve this mural not only because of its artistic significance, but also because of its importance to Philadelphia's history, to the Point Breeze community and the LGBTQ community. We hope you will vote to designate it an historic object with cultural significance.

Haring was born in Pennsylvania and came to Philadelphia specifically to create this work of art. The mural was created in 1987 as part of the Bicentennial celebration. Keith chose to do the mural in Point Breeze. Young people in the Point Breeze neighborhood helped create the mural. This mural needs to stay in Philadelphia and in the Point Breeze community.

We have lost many works of cultural and historical significance in Philadelphia. We need to save this one.

Sincerely,

Margaret Harris
228 S. 21st St.
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-470-5238
margaretharris@me.com

From: [RJ Rushmore](#)
To: [preservation](#)
Subject: Haring Mural Comment
Date: Friday, August 28, 2026 1:44:02 PM

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Hello,

I am writing in support of the nomination of Keith Haring's "We the Youth" mural at 2147–2149 Ellsworth Street to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

I am a writer and curator whose work focuses on public art and street art. I have produced mural projects in England, New York, and Philadelphia, and I have written multiple books on public art. Most recently, I worked with Mural Arts Philadelphia on a separate mural project in Point Breeze.

I applaud the staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission for nominating Keith Haring's "We the Youth" for listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. "We the Youth" is a Philadelphia landmark, a standout mural even in a city known for its public art. As the nomination notes, Philadelphia would not be the first jurisdiction to recognize the historic importance of a Keith Haring mural. Haring's 1984 mural in Australia was added to the Victorian Heritage Register in 2004.

I also urge the Committee to reject the argument that the ordinary consequences of historic designation weigh against designation here. Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Executive Director Paul Steinke has warned that designation can have "lasting effects on property, new construction, and neighborhood revitalization." Of course it can. In all their years of hard work, is this the first time that the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia has noticed those consequences? Besides, it is well understood that public art (especially by famous artists like Haring) contributes to neighborhood revitalization. Does every mural by a famous artist warrant these protections against new construction and similar issues? No. But this mural is exceptional, and as such, merits an exception.

I am also concerned by whispers of proposals to preserve "We the Youth" by relocating it. The idea that the mural can or should be moved, except as an absolute last resort, is ridiculous. Relocation is a complicated and expensive matter involving conservation, engineering, specialized transportation and storage, and a suitable permanent destination. "We the Youth" was created for this wall, in Point Breeze, collaboratively with young people from the neighborhood, and for public view. Its location is part of its historical meaning. Tearing it down, especially without a plan to display the mural elsewhere, risks changing its historical context and meaning, taking it out of public view indefinitely, or even destroying the artwork.

Take the example of Bernard Zakheim's "The History of Medicine in California," a mural painted at the University of California, San Francisco in the 1930's. In 2021, this 10-panel mural was removed from the walls of a UCSF lecture hall and placed in storage. With no new home for the artwork, the panels have sat in storage ever since. Meticulously preserved and cared for, but hidden from public view.

If OCF or other groups want to propose relocating "We the Youth", they should present a detailed conservation plan that includes a fully funded removal and reinstallation strategy, an identified new home for the mural, and a promise to maintain public access. I have seen no such plan.

Preserving a historical site this important should not be left to the preferences of current or future property owners. Without designation, the mural remains vulnerable to alteration, removal, or destruction.

I urge the Committee on Historic Designation and the Historical Commission to follow through on their nomination and list "We the Youth" in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. We are lucky to have a Haring mural in our city, even better that it still stands in the neighborhood and on the wall for which it was created. Let's care for it properly.

Thank you,
RJ Rushmore

--

RJ Rushmore, CAIA

RJRushmore.com

Pronouns - He/him

Cell - +1-347-331-9127

From: [preservation](#)
To: [Alexander Till](#)
Subject: FW: Save the Keith Haring mural
Date: Monday, August 31, 2026 8:44:18 AM

From: Marsha Moss <marshamoss2@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2026 8:57 AM
To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>
Cc: Marsha Moss <marshamoss2@gmail.com>
Subject: Save the Keith Haring mural

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Dear Director,

We in Philadelphia have felt so fortunate to have one of Keith Haring's very few public murals. In fact, I frequently include this amazing piece when I take out-of-towners on a tour of our beautiful city.

Now the mural is in jeopardy of being removed. Please protect it! It is a Philadelphia treasure!

With appreciation for your effort,

Marsha Moss

--

Marsha Moss
Public Art Curator & Consultant
[215-990-5583](tel:215-990-5583)
marshamoss2@gmail.com
marshamoss.com



September 1, 2026

Dear Members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission,

I am writing to offer my fullest and most emphatic support for preserving and restoring **Keith Haring's *We the Youth* mural in place on site in South Philadelphia**. In a city whose historic landscape holds an extraordinary place in the American story, *We the Youth* stands as one of Philadelphia's most precious—and precarious—works of public art. Its preservation is an opportunity for Philadelphia to affirm that places where art, history, community, and civic life converge are essential parts of our historic landscape.

Keith Haring is one of the country's most significant artists of the 20th century. Born in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1958, Haring developed a singular approach to public art that bridged storytelling, popular culture, history, and advocacy. Across museums, galleries, subways, storefronts, and public spaces, he created a graphic language of extraordinary significance and global renown. More than three decades after his death, Haring remains a defining figure of engaged, democratic artmaking.

We the Youth is particularly significant because it is both a work by Haring and created *in place* in Philadelphia. Created in South Philadelphia in 1987 for the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, the mural was made collaboratively with CityKids of New York and Philadelphia's Brandywine Workshop. Its history is rooted not only in Haring's artistic vision, but also in youth participation, arts education, neighborhood life, and civic ideals. As Mural Arts Philadelphia has written, "the mural is quintessential Keith Haring. In the work and on the wall, Haring's artistic vision—his energy, life, and spirit—serves as his testimony."

That phrase—"in the work and on the wall"—is especially important now. The significance of *We the Youth* cannot be separated from the place where it was created. Painted collaboratively onto a building in South Philadelphia, it has been experienced for nearly four decades as part of the neighborhood and streetscape. The wall is not merely a substrate for an artwork; its location, setting, and public accessibility are fundamental to the mural's history and meaning.

The mural's significance is also reflected in the remarkable community of stewardship surrounding it. The Keith Haring Foundation, Mural Arts Philadelphia, and the Neighborhood Gardens Trust bring distinct commitments to Haring's legacy, Philadelphia's mural tradition, and the preservation of community-held public space. Their engagement demonstrates that preserving *We the Youth* is a shared civic responsibility, with local and national stakeholders committed to its future.

Of the 74 public murals Haring created during his lifetime, only about half remain fully or partially intact. This number will no doubt dwindle over the coming years. *We the Youth* has endured the forces of time, neighborhood change, redevelopment, and shifting ownership. The possibility that the mural could be deconstructed, removed from its

historic setting, and sold into the private market would represent a profound and priceless loss—not only of an irreplaceable Haring work, but of a crucial piece of Philadelphia’s public and commemorative landscape. It would fundamentally alter what Haring and his collaborators of: a mural collaboratively made on site *for* and *within* the public realm.

For that reason, I urge the Philadelphia Historical Commission and the City of Philadelphia to use the tools and authority available to them to support preserving and restoring *We the Youth* in place on site. Historic significance resides not only in an object, but also in the relationships summoned through artmaking, architecture, neighborhood, memory, and public access.

We the Youth remains one of Philadelphia’s most treasured sites of memory—for the story of its creation, its extraordinary aesthetic and cultural value, its neighborhood context, and its enduring presence within a historic city. Its future should remain here as well.

I respectfully urge the Philadelphia Historical Commission and the City of Philadelphia to ensure that Keith Haring’s *We the Youth* is preserved and restored in place on site, remaining publicly accessible and inseparable from the Philadelphia community and landscape for which it was created.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul M. Farber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul M. Farber, PhD
Director, Monument Lab

From: [Jon Farnham](#)
To: [Alexander Till](#)
Subject: Fw: keith haring mural
Date: Tuesday, September 1, 2026 8:20:20 AM

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

From: Mcinerney, John P <mcinernj@upenn.edu>
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2026 8:47 PM
To: Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>
Subject: keith haring mural

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John,
I know the Keith Haring mural will be up for preservation soon. I wanted to add my voice to the effort to save this important piece of our collective history. I know you have heard a lot of reasons why that mural is so special. Keith was such an incredible artist and person, and he loved Philadelphia. There is actually a hidden Haring mural at Penn we are also trying to save. It is important for so many people and such a joyful demonstration of our collective history. Please save the mural. If there is anything I or Penn can do please let me know.
thank you for your support
john

John McInerney
Executive Director | [The Sachs Program for Arts Innovation](#)
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CITY OF PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL

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August 31, 2026

To the Members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission and Committee on Historic Designation,

I am writing in strong support of the nomination of Keith Haring's We the Youth for designation as a historic object on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

We the Youth is an extraordinary part of Philadelphia's artistic and cultural history. Created by internationally renowned Pennsylvania born artist Keith Haring in 1987 in collaboration with Philadelphia and New York City youth, the mural embodies Haring's commitment to making art accessible to the public and engaging communities directly in the creative process. It is also the only surviving collaborative public mural by Haring that remains intact on its original site, and the only Haring mural in Philadelphia or Pennsylvania.

The mural's significance extends beyond its artistic rarity. Haring deliberately chose to create this work in Point Breeze rather than in a more affluent or traditional cultural setting, and its history is inseparable from the neighborhood in which it was created. As Point Breeze has experienced significant change and development, preserving We the Youth in its original location protects not only an important work of art, but an important piece of Philadelphia's community history.

As Philadelphia's first openly LGBTQ+ member of City Council, I also recognize the particular cultural significance of preserving Haring's work. Haring became an important figure in LGBTQ+ history through both his art and his public advocacy during the AIDS crisis. His work continues to serve as a powerful and accessible expression of LGBTQ+ identity, love, community, and activism. Preserving We the Youth allows future generations to encounter that history not only in museums and archives, but in a Philadelphia neighborhood where Haring himself worked alongside young people to create it.

We the Youth represents the democratic possibilities of public art: art created with a community, for a community, and preserved because that community recognized its value. I strongly urge the Committee on Historic Designation and the Philadelphia Historical Commission to designate the mural as a historic object and ensure that this irreplaceable part of Philadelphia's artistic and cultural heritage remains in place for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rue Landau". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Rue Landau
Philadelphia City Councilmember



Eleanor Nairne

Keith L and Katherine Sachs Curator and Head of Modern and Contemporary Art
Philadelphia Museum of Art
2600 Benjamin Franklin Parkway
PA 19130

3 September 2026

Dear Members of the Committee,

Re: Support for the nomination of *We the Youth* (2147–49 Ellsworth Street) by Keith Haring for historic designation and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

As a curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I write to lend my professional support to the nomination of *We the Youth*—Keith Haring's 1987 mural at 2147–49 Ellsworth Street in Point Breeze—for historic designation and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. I strongly urge the Committee to recommend this designation to the full Historical Commission.

From a curatorial perspective, *We the Youth* holds singular art-historical importance as the only collaborative public mural by Keith Haring that survives intact on its original site anywhere in the world. Created in partnership with the Brandywine Workshop, CityKids of New York, and local youth to mark the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, the mural brought civic inclusion to a Point Breeze neighborhood then facing significant disinvestment. By reframing the Constitution's preamble, the title insists on the presence of young people and marginalized communities in the American narrative—a hallmark of Haring's commitment to accessible, socially meaningful art.

This site represents an exceptionally rare artifact within Haring's broader career. Between 1982 and 1989, Haring produced over 50 public works around the world, driven by a belief that art should be accessible to all regardless of socio-economic status. Following his death from AIDS-related illnesses in 1990 at age 31, his universal visual language continues to garner recognition internationally to this day. Because much of his public art has since been lost, *We the Youth* remains the clearest surviving record of his collaborative public practice.

Beyond its artistic merit, the mural serves as a landmark of community resilience. For nearly 30 years, its vibrant design of signature dancing figures has graced Point Breeze, making it both a beloved neighborhood icon and a global pilgrimage site. As Point Breeze faces rapid redevelopment, formal designation is vital to safeguard local heritage rather than leaving its protection to chance.

Designation would formalize what is already true: *We the Youth* is an irreplaceable piece of Philadelphian and American art history. I respectfully ask the Committee to recommend its inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to preserving our city's heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "E. Nairne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "E" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eleanor Nairne



16 September 2026

RE: 2147-49 Ellsworth Street Historic Designation

Chair Frankel:

The Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO) has been asked by community organizations to provide a letter regarding the above referenced designation. The PA SHPO has not evaluated Keith Haring's 'We The Youth' mural for its eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and is unable to provide the requested letter. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) has, however, recognized Keith Haring's significance in art and pop-culture in the 1980s through a historical marker in his hometown of Kutztown. Dedicated in 2024, the marker recognizes Haring's national significance and his instantly recognizable art style and sociopolitical issues he addressed through his work.

As a Certified Local Government, the City of Philadelphia has made a commitment to implement and administer a local historic preservation program which conforms to the CLG *Ongoing Performance Standards*. These *Standards* charge communities to establish criteria and processes for designation which allow them to evaluate whether historic places are significant within their own context. The Philadelphia Historical Commission, and its staff, have applied the City's criteria thousands of times to render decisions regarding the significance of historic resources in Philadelphia.

PA SHPO is confident that the Philadelphia Historical Commission will give this designation due consideration and will rely on the expertise that the Commission, and its staff, possess in rendering a decision.

Sincerely,

Andrea L. MacDonald,
Director and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office