Overview of

DePaul School & Evaluation of Nomination and Impact of Historic Designation of St. Francis of Assisi Church

DePaul School

48-60 W. Logan St, Philadelphia, PA 19144

for

Independence Mission Schools

c/o Michael F. Young, Board Member

1012 West Thompson Street

Philadelphia, PA 19122

by

Civic**Visions** LP
Philadelphia. PA

November 11, 2026


W. Logan Street


Rockland Street


W. Logan Street


Greene Street

St. Francis of Assisi Church
DePaul School
40-60 W. Logan St, Philadelphia, PA 19144

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Date: 1924

Architect: F. Ferdinand Durang

Type: Institutional: Former Church

Style: Generic Gothic

Description: 1.226 acre property with a former Roman Catholic church building and a four-story elementary/middle DePaul School separated by open space. The former church is a masonry building with tower built with lime-based mortar and terra cotta fenestration components. All components incuding the roof are in poor condition. The sub-basement is flooded; steel floor framing above is corroded. All decorative and stained glass have been removed. Mechanical and electrical systems are not functioning

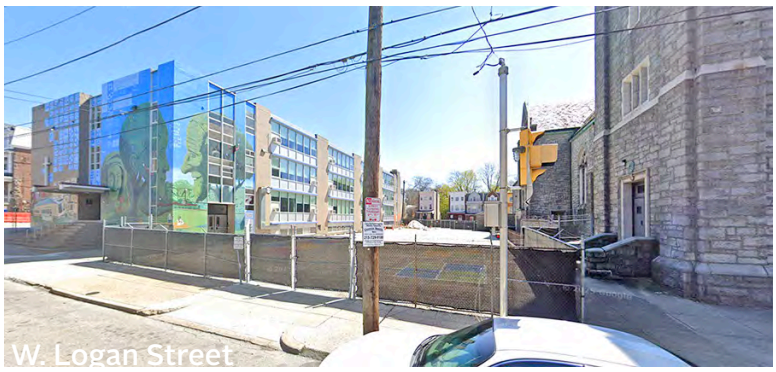
Context: The Church has been nominated for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

Land Use: Civic/Institution

Zoning: RSA3 Residential/Multi-Family/Residential Mixed-Use

Ownership: Independence Mission Schools




W. Logan Street

Introduction

Independence Mission Schools respectfully requests that the historical nomination of St. Francis of Assisi Church be rejected because it was submitted to subvert a project that undoes years of public planning and investment that had been undertaken in reliance on the property's lack of historic designation.

- Fourteen years have passed between the church's closure in 2012 and the submission of the nomination in late April of 2026.
- Between 2016 when the Independence Mission Schools group purchased the school and the present, more than $300,000 was expended evaluating reuse alternatives, among them a gymnasium, an auditorium and finally a multi-use space; funding raising began with grants from the state; engineering and environmental studies were undertaken.
- By late 2024 it was determined that because of the discovery of asbestos, structural and design issues the costs of adaptive reuse and repair could never be met by the school.
- Demolition was the only sustainable option that would protect the school's existence and budget.
- In place of the building, the school proposes to create that rarest of assets in Germantown, a grassed playing field and expansion of an existing playground that would benefit the children and attract later generations of students.
- The demolition planning process was discussed with the public, and beginning in 2024, significant economic and institutional commitments were made toward the demolition planning and permit preparation processes. By spring of 2026, demolition was imminent.

Given these circumstances, the nomination's late timing unfairly disrupts the school and interrupts a process that was well advanced - factors that should strongly weigh against designation.

Readily available published sources explain the reasons why the Archdiocese closed the St. Francis of Assisi parish in 2012.

- The church was built in the early 20th century to serve an Irish community who worked in the factories around the railroads in Germantown.
- By 2000 these factories had closed and the membership of the parish had dwindled to a few families who could not support the facilities and priests.
- By the first decade of the twenty-first century, 73% of the parish members had died or moved from the neighborhood, making it one of the smallest congregations in the city.
- This closing was part of a tidal wave of institutional abandonment across north and north central Philadelphia that left large areas without schools, churches and institutional leadership.

- The existing school remained open in 2012 after the parish closure.
- In 2013 the Independence Mission Schools organization rented the school building; three years later in Dec. 9, 2016, the extent of necessary repairs made a purchase more appropriate. The Archdiocese required that the purchase include the church building, transferring it to the school.

The church building has played at most a minor role in the architectural history of Germantown or its neighborhood. By contrast there are numerous important churches including St. Vincent De Paul Roman Catholic Church, the striking free Gothic Market Square Presbyterian Church, the Victorian Gothic campus of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, the colonial revival building of the former Christian Methodist Church as well as the Trinity Lutheran church and the Germantown Quaker Meeting all at highly visible locations. By contrast, neighbors today note the relative lack of presence of St. Francis given its siting and the topography.

- The church was the work of F. Ferdinand Durang (1884-1966) a minor architect who continued the practice of his father, Edwin F. Durang, albeit without the energy or skill of the original office.
- By the 1920s the Durang office had become a plan factory that simply pulled designs out of a drawer, made a few modifications, and sent them out again.
- In this instance the similarities of plan and facade order with St. Donato's Church in Overbrook and Immaculate Conception in East Germantown are obvious.
- Durang was not an architect that other architects studied and imitated, and St. Francis was itself a compilation of bits of earlier Durang projects.

As evidence of the decline of the Durang office, historical records show that it was not sufficiently knowledgeable in the changing processes and materials of modern construction. A generation earlier one of its buildings, St. Joseph's Hall for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Chestnut Hill, had collapsed as it neared completion (1900). The Durang firm was abandoned, and it was rebuilt from plans and specifications by the notable architectural / engineering firm of the Wilson Brothers.[1]

- In the case of the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, lumps of loose mortar in the main tower can be crushed in one's hand suggesting that the construction materials remained inadequate. Soft mortars were characteristic of the Victorian office's work and their use evidently continued into the 20th century.
- Two important engineering firms with wide experience in historic architecture, Keast & Hood and Thornton Tomasetti have both evaluated the church building and found significant additional problems that would require

[1] See Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, see PAB, Chestnut Hill Historic District files, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ho_display.cfm/724845 (accessed 11.10.26).

extensive and expensive reconstruction and repair that makes the project unfeasible.
- After the Keast & Hood evaluation, materials testing as part of the preparation for adaptive reuse found asbestos fibers in floor tiles; retesting in 2026 as part of the preparation for demolition found far more extensive use of asbestos as a binder in all of the wall and ceiling plaster.
- The pervasiveness of asbestos would have meant that physical modifications to the building would have been extremely expensive, requiring abatement systems around areas where openings might be cut or walls removed to provide for other uses.
- Given its pervasiveness, the asbestos containing materials would have had to be totally removed whether the building was reused or demolished.
- Another construction issue was the consequence of the choice of wire lathe to carry large portions of the interior plaster. Where it is exposed to moisture from the roof and side walls, it is now rusting and breaking free of the structure and collapsing, adding additional costs to remove the materials and repair the damage, whether the building was renovated or demolished.

Given these circumstances, adaptive reuses would have been prohibitively expensive, while as the architects learned, also not providing effective spaces for proposed athletic facilities, auditorium, or as a cafeteria. The sale of the building would not have benefited the school either because it would eliminate the opportunity for a playing field adjacent to the school. Because the DePaul school is a remarkable asset in its community, one that benefits children while stabilizing real estate values, its economic security should be weighed in this process and the value of the playing field in attracting future students should not be discounted.

Overview of DePaul School project for Independence Mission Schools and impact of historic designation of St. Francis of Assisi Church

Chronology – 2012- 2026

Between 2006 and 2012, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia entered into a planning process with the goal of reducing the number of independent congregations from 266 to 229.[2] One of the congregations that was closed was St. Francis of Assisi in Germantown. After it closed in the summer of 2012, the former church building was reopened for a moment in November of 2013 when it was leased to the Victory Community Church. Two days after its first service on

[2] The plans of the Archdiocese are placed in the context of institutional abandonment of large areas of Philadelphia in John Vidumsky, "The Geography Of Retreat," Hidden City (April 12, 2013) https://hiddencityphila.org/2013/04/the-geography-of-retreat/ (accessed 11.11.26)

November 24, the church had a catastrophic fire in the left transept that burned through the floor, paneling, and much of the adjacent plasterwork.[3]

Notably no one sought to designate the building when it closed or had a fire.

Immediately after the initial closing of the church, the stained-glass windows and moveable religious elements of the design were salvaged by the Archdiocese for use in new churches. At a later date important attached interior fittings including elements of the Stations of the Cross were stolen from the church.[4] These features were the most significant remaining design elements of the building – and they are now removed or in the case of the murals of the interior, are badly damaged by smoke.

In 2013 the parish school was leased by an independent non-profit organization, Independence Mission Schools (IMS).[5] When it became clear that the school required significant improvements, IMS determined to purchase the building. That transfer occurred on the 9th of December 2016. The IMS organization had been founded in 2013 in response to the closing of parishes and schools with the dual mission of preserving educational choices in underserved neighborhoods while maintaining high standards for education. Within two years, IMS had leased 12 school buildings including the parish school of St. Francis of Assisi. Under IMS leadership the DePaul School has marked educational continuity and a growing school community that spans the city while being based in Germantown.

The purchase of the school led to an evaluation of the entire facility which found the need for major improvements to the exterior envelope beginning with entirely new energy efficient windows and a new roof.[6] This was followed by the requirement for new electrical services to serve the computer programs of the modern curriculum. The increasing heat of spring and fall in Philadelphia led to the decision to add air conditioning to the HVAC system. These expenses, $534,990.00 for the windows and roof, $239,004.00 for the electrical services, and $320,100.00 for the new HVAC brought the school up to a high standard and were paid for the by IMS operators.

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[3] John Henry Scott, "Germantown Neighbors Wary But Hopeful Over Plans For Abandoned St. Francis Of Assisi" *Hidden City* (September 29, 2016).

[4] Christopher Mote, "Top Ten Significant, Vulnerable Churches," *Hidden City* (April 19, 2013). Mote reported on the thefts from St. Francis of Assisi "Since then, the vacant church has already been broken into by vandals who have desecrated the altar and stolen religious ornaments."

[5] Planning dates are from an attached chronology with documents, prepared by Steven Kline of Regan Kline Cross Architects dated July 6, 2026.

[6] The chronology of IMS investments, planning, and decision making, prepared by Steven Kline of RKC Architects, is found at the end of this report.

With the school up to date, the leaders of the school began to study potential uses for the church building in the hope that it too could benefit the school program. On September 14 & 20, 2018, the school was notified by the city's Department of Licenses and Inspections of structural failures on the façade and interior of the church. The school commissioned engineers Elton & Thompson, P.C. for structural repairs. Architects Regan Kline Cross Architects (RKC Architects) were employed by the school to supervise the renovations and have continued as the architects for improvements to the school and for the potential reuse of the church (see chronology at end of report).

To meet these costs and to begin amassing funding for the adaptive reuse of the church, the school began fundraising and quickly received two state grants totaling $1,000,000.00 toward the school improvements and the future adaptive reuse of the church building. Between March 16 and April 19, 2023 contracts were negotiated with the Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) for an award of $250,000.00 toward the Church Renovation Project. Work simultaneously proceeded on the school and the necessary façade repairs were made to the church building.

In the late winter of 2020 or early 2021 local architects Kreiger & Associates were engaged to develop a reuse strategy. They were well known in the region for their work with prep school planning and design including planning for the merger of the Springside School and the Chestnut Hill Academy. They retained Keast & Hood, PE engineers to evaluate the structure. The engineer's evaluation identified issues that would be of concern:

> "Those structural concerns include: fire damage, plaster ceiling water damage, corroding concealed steel framing, shifting/cracking exterior stair wing walls, cracked or spalling stone masonry and terra cotta, basement standing water, and mortar loss/water damage at the basement foundation wall." (Keast & Hood report)

> "At the east tower, the east wall exhibits a large crack along the underside of the floor slab/wall intersection (see Photos 10 & 11); it appears that a concrete encased steel beam is located embedded into the wall. This beam exhibits surface corrosion and is causing rust jacking (the corrosion of steel framing that applies outward pressures on the surrounding masonry causing cracking and spalling). At the west tower, the west wall exhibits similar cracking but not as extensive as the east tower." (K & H Report).

Working from the Krieger & Associates designs the construction firm of National Maintenance & Build Out Company, LLC provided a budget for full repairs and

adaptation to an interior sports and multi-use facility as part of the RACP grant. (email from NMBOC to school Date: March 31, 2021 at 3:22:58 PM EDT).

Estimate $12,500,000.00 for full repairs and new use.

This figure was far beyond the capacities of the school. On 1 April 2024 the school commissioned a second firm, RKC Architects, to look at ways that the church building could more economically be adapted to uses that would complement the programmatic needs of the school. Various plans were evaluated including a possible auditorium or even a sports hall with basketball courts and other functions.

> Notably however, even though the church building had been vacated in 2012, had suffered a fire during the brief period that it was the Community Church in 2013, and then was vacant during the early years when it was part of the DePaul School property, *no one attempted to designate the building.*

Working on the assumption that the church could be adapted to a new use, the school architects (RKC) hired consultants to determine if there were asbestos containing materials (ACM) and hazardous building materials (HBM) that would need to be abated as part of the adaptive reuse of the church as a multi-purpose space. These materials were found in the floor tiles with other hazardous materials in light fixtures and wall and ceiling plaster; costs of removal of the flooring and areas where plaster would be cut for new uses were added to the costs of adapting the building but the school pressed forward.

> By the fall of 2024, the architects (RKC) issued several schematic layouts for the various proposed uses.

In November 2024, the architects suggested shortening the main tower of the church building to lower the façade below the 55' threshold that required inspections every five years. Because they already had the $12.5M estimate for reuse, an alternate "ballpark" bid was sought from demolition contractors for demolishing the entire complex of church and rectory in the chance that adaptive reuse would be too expensive. Bids for those projects were received on December 11, 2024.

- As the various new uses were explored and as plans were made to shorten the tower or even to demolish the entire church complex, again *no one tried to designate the building*.

During the next year in the winter and spring of 2025, budget estimates were received. At that point the reality of the costs of full HVAC, toilet room plumbing and electrical services recreation together with renovating, maintaining and heating the

church and rectory buildings were recognized by the school. The cost estimates for only renovating the first floor of the building for the new uses alone had reached more than $4.5 million with additional costs for incorporating upper levels and for restoring heating systems and for ongoing maintenance growing every year. In the spring of 2025, Robert E. Blue, consulting engineers were asked to prepare a contract for the demolition documents and city demolition permits for the site (Blue to Kline, RKC Architects, April 25, 2025). Despite this change of direction *no one attempted to designate the building.*

The Blue contract marked the point when the school and the architects had determined that none of the re-uses were particularly well suited to the available space. The nave was too narrow for a regulation basketball court with adequate courtside seating. The auditorium placed too many seats at too great a distance from the front. Other uses were equally difficult. Paralleling the Blue letter, on June 20, 2025, having exhausted all possible avenues for funding and uses, the school and its architects determined that the best option to preserve the economic survival of the school was demolition. In place of the interior uses, the site of the church would serve as a much-needed playground and sports field for the school children that was immediately adjacent to the school.

- In a dense urban neighborhood with few open space resources, such a space could make the school more attractive for students and parents.
- Selling the building to another user was not a good option. Though the school might receive some payment for the building, the problems of its site with its lack of parking meant that it was unlikely that a church that did not draw from the immediate neighborhood could survive.
- At the same time, such a sale would not fund the purchase of open space and playgrounds around the school because no such spaces are available.

In October of 2025, updated publicly accessible RDA-300 forms were submitted to PIDC reflecting the changed reality of the project from adaptive reuse to demolition and planning for a new playground and soccer field. Again *no one attempted to designate the building.*

In early January of 2026, RFPs were prepared by the architects that requested updated ACM and HBM removal bids for demolition purposes, and Civil Engineering and Architecture fees to prepare demolition contracts. Funds totaling $265,000.00 that could be covered by the state funds were expended. With demolition as the ultimate course, additional ACM and HBM testing discovered asbestos in all of the plaster throughout the building. Removal costs increased 1500% from the initial

range of $69,000 - $86,000 to a revised estimate of $860,000 - $1,389,000 for the asbestos removal alone with demolition for the structure costing an equal amount. On February 23, 2026 an RFP was issued to demolition contractors for the demolition of the church and rectory. Bids were received on March 20th 2026 and negotiations began with the firms that had submitted bids.

Two days before demolition bids were received, on March 18, 2026 a nomination to designate St. Francis on the Philadelphia register was received by the Philadelphia Historical Commission. Over the next month, the nomination was reviewed but it appears that the school's August 2025 revisions to its RCAP/PIDC grant applications and the October 2025 filings that presented to the state the change of the proposed project from adaptive reuse to demolition were not found.

With no notice of the initial filing of the nomination, before the nomination was approved, the school continued taking steps toward demolition.

- On April 13, 2026, the school signed contracts with Robert E. Blue, Consulting Engineers to prepare the engineering documents that would support the permit applications for demolition three days before the nomination was declared complete. This was by then twelve months after the Blue firm had drafted its proposal on April 25th, 2025 marking the final turn of the project toward demolition and 18 months after the first discussion of demolition in November, 2024.
- The nomination was mailed to the Independence Mission Schools on April 17, 2026.

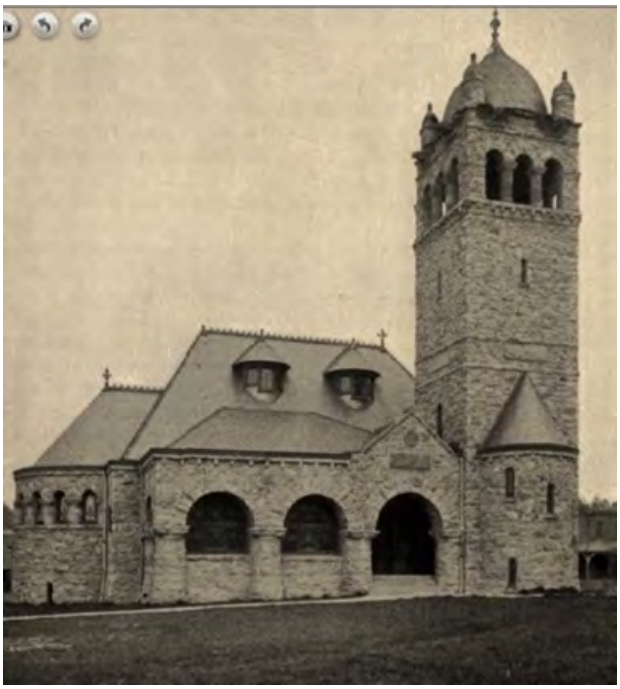
Conclusion

The nomination was not filed in a timely fashion. More than 14 years had passed since the closing of the church. In the intervening years the school had funded extensive studies of adaptive reuse possibilities, but its leaders were forced to conclude that the building was not suited for such uses and would have such costs and ongoing maintenance and utilities that would impair the future of the school. Since November 2024 the school has been actively working toward and funding steps toward demolition. Having been filed at such a late date with the demolition contracts prepared and demolition permits being prepared by an engineer, the nomination should be rejected.

PHC criteria for architectural nominations - "exceptional caliber" and "imitated by others" – St. Francis of Assisi is not of sufficient significance to warrant designation

From the criteria of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, the career of the church designer F. Ferdinand Durang (1884-1966) and the building that he designed for the Church of St. Francis do not meet the PHC standards for significant design. They require an artist of "exceptional caliber whose work is imitated by others" or a building that has been imitated by others.

By 1924 when Ferdinand Durang designed the church, he had taken over his father's (Edwin Forrest Durang, 1829 - 1911) business and was carrying on an undistinguished practice of church designs that largely repeated the tropes of his father's Victorian schemes that by then were very much out of date. Features of the exterior including the domical crown of the façade tower had become commonplaces in Philadelphia churches, beginning with Theophilus Parsons Chandler's Patterson Presbyterian Church (1888 – 1895) on 63rd Street with its red Vermont slate clad dome and Paul Henon's Ascension Church of our Lord, Roman Catholic Church (1919) at F and Westmoreland Streets that again had a tiled dome at the top of its façade tower.





Left: Mary Elizabeth Patterson parish house and tower (T. P. Chandler, 1888); right: Ascension Church of our Lord (Henon & Boyle, 1919)



St. Francis of Assisi (F. Ferdinand Durang, 1924), domed tower

The nave of Henon's church was built with a hung plaster barrel vault spanning the interior that again was imitated by Durang in his St. Francis of Assisi church five years later. Durang's work is derivative, not original.





Left: interior of Paul Henon's Ascension Church of our Lord – large barrel - vaulted nave; Right: interior of F. Ferdinand Durang's St. Francis of Assisi – large barrel-vaulted nave

With its stained glass windows and church furniture and fittings removed by the Archdiocese for use in other churches at the time of the sale, with the nave murals badly damaged by the 2013 fire, with the main building's architecture being conventional and borrowed from other sources, this church's design does not

warrant designation that brings the heavy burden that its maintenance and repairs would cause for the school that owns the building.

The Ferdinand Durang firm brings nothing to the history of the site. Shortly after the completion of St. Francis of Assisi, the Ferdinand Durang firm was dissolved and he moved to New York. The last decade of his activity was as the editor of a small architecture journal *Architects' Exchange*. Tellingly Ferdinand Durang was never elevated to Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

DURANG, F. FERDINAND. AIA 21. New Jersey Chapter
† F. Ferdinand Durang, 90 New England Ave, Summit, N.J.
b. Phila, Pa, 1884. Educ: Univ. of Pa, B. Arch, 06. Dftsmn, Edwin F. Durang, Archt; Partner, Edwin F. Durang & Son; Principal, F. Ferdinand Durang, Consult. Archt. Present Firm: F. Ferdinand Durang, Consult. Archt. Reg: N.J, N.Y, Pa. Gen. Types: 1,2,4. Bks. Pub: Architects' Exchange, four times a year for the last 8 yrs.

R. W. Bowker, *Architects Directory,* 1957

Ferdinand Durang's brief biography in the Bowker *Architect's Directory* for 1957 is remarkable for its lack of mention of any significant commissions. Furthermore, research finds no record that he ever attended the University of Pennsylvania, as claimed here. More damning is Sandra Tatman's conclusion about Ferdinand Durang's work when she commented: "… its style is the generic Gothic that could have been created any time after the turn of the century."[7] This was also the case for this undistinguished church building.

Philadelphia Historical Commission Criteria

(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;

> No claim is made for this building. It does not meet the significance test; it is an insignificant building by an unimportant architect.

(b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;

> No claim is made for this criterion.

(c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;

[7] Sandra Tatman, "Francis Ferdinand Durang, Sr." Philadelphia Architects and Buildings website

There is nothing distinctive about this building; it is one of many similar designs by the architect and the building itself is a jumble of stylistic features selected from a terra cotta manufacturer. The building itself is bits of Gothic, and Romanesque, and most weirdly, classical with Corinthian columns flanking the entrance and a sort of Roman Bath interior coming down on classical columns. The broad façade could be ornamented in any style. There is nothing distinctive about this.

(d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;

This is a minor design with no features that rise to the level of distinction. All of the ornament of the façade, in the terra cotta ornamental door frames on either side of the building, and in the ornamental features such as the Rose Window above the main entrance were mass-produced in terra cotta.

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

Ferdinand Durang was out of date in his manner and insignificant by the time church was built. Sandra Tatman described his work as "Generic Gothic" which is fine save for the other bits that are woven through the design. New more adventurous architects had taken the lead for the Archdiocese when this was built.

(f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation;

Innovation is not claimed – nor was any innovation found in the building when it was examined.

(g) Is part of or related to a square, park, or other distinctive area that should be preserved according to a historic, cultural, or architectural motif;

Not claimed. It is not part of a significant or distinctive area.

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

This is not claimed but it would have low visual impact because it is invisible from major streets on a side street location.

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

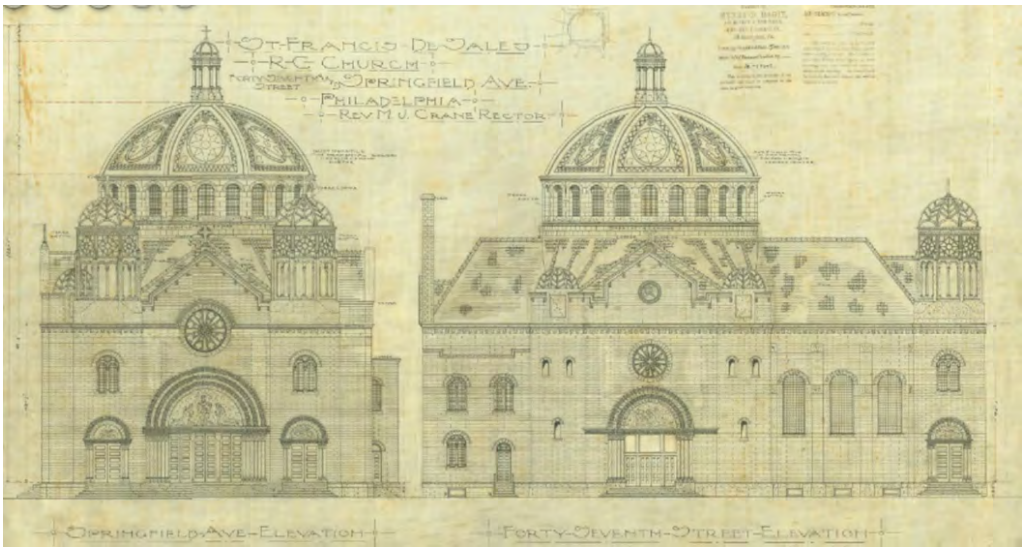
Not applicable.

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

> The community for which it was designed has entirely changed. This is evident in the US Census that shows an entirely white, largely Irish and Italian neighborhood in 1950 which had become nearly entirely African American by the US Decennial census. It was this loss of its congregation that precipitated the closing of the church in 2012. According to newspaper articles, 73% of the congregation had disappeared, either by moving or death between 2006 and 2012. Churches above all building types are reflectors of their congregations.

Significant Roman Catholic Church Architects in Philadelphia in the early 20th C.

The Durang firm had lost its supremacy in Philadelphia's Roman Catholic Church architecture even before its takeover by Edwin Forrest Durang's son, Ferdinand. By 1907, the office of Henry Dagit was designing innovative churches, none more arresting than St. Francis De Sales in West Philadelphia at 47th Street. That church borrowed from the composition of Price & McLanahan's early masterpiece, the Blenheim Hotel in Atlantic City which featured a pair of smaller domed towers in front of the giant tiled clad rotunda of the main hotel block. Price's hotel introduced features of northern Spanish baroque with patterned colored tile cladding domes as on *Nuestra Señora del Pilar* in Zaragosa, Spain. Dagit added to the interest of St. Francis de Sales by commissioning the famed Gustavino firm to create a tile-dome that hovers over the main nave space and on the exterior was clad in brilliant-colored tiles in greens and yellows – the same colors as the Spanish source.



Henry Dagit, front and side elevations with polychromed dome exterior



St. Francis De Sales c. 2000, prior to the removal of the colorful tile cladding the domes for waterproofing. (https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com)

The Dagit office would go on to a national practice ranging far beyond Roman Catholic Churches and continued as a significant modern architectural firm with the office of Dagit / Saylor that practiced into the 21st century.

Another significant firm that was favored by the Archdiocese was George I. Lovatt (1878 – 1958). According to Sandra Tatman in the Philadelphia Architects & Buildings site:

> "Lovatt's firm received both local and national honors, gleaning a commendation for the Church of the Most Precious Blood, 26th and Diamond streets, Philadelphia, in 1926 at the International Exhibition held in Barcelona, Spain. He followed this honor in 1930 by winning the Philadelphia Chapter of the AIA's gold medal for his Church of the Holy Child, Broad and Duncannon streets, Philadelphia. In 1927 he was joined in the firm by his son George I. Lovatt, Jr., but he did not retire until 1940."

Lovatt's international, national and local awards contrast with the lack of awards and similar recognition for the Ferdinand Durang office.



George I. Lovatt & Son – Church of the Holy Child (1928), Broad & Duncannon Sts. (Google Streetview)



George I. Lovatt, view of Church of the Holy Child from the east (Google Streetview)

Closing of the St. Francis Parish and Building Acquisition

By 2012, the St. Francis of Assisi parish had lost most of its parishioners, 73% having left the congregation in the previous decade.[8] Beginning after World War II, the population groups of the original Irish and later Italian families who formed the congregation had moved out of Germantown as the factory jobs that had sustained the working population closed. New populations, largely African American, and with different religious affiliations were moving into the neighborhood.[9] A comparison of the population census tracts of the area when the church was built and when it thrived and the present population explains the collapse of the church congregation. In the most recent available US Census for 1950, the entire population in the vicinity was Caucasian.[10] In the Decennial Census for 2010, 134 families were listed in immediate district, 125 being African American for 93% of the population.

When the Archdiocese closed parishes, many schools that had been lifelines for their neighborhoods were scheduled for closing. However, before the parish closed in 2012, the parish school of St. Francis, renamed the DePaul School in 2004 had continued to serve the children of both the St. Francis and the St. Vincent de Paul congregations. This cadre of existing students led the Independence Mission Schools leadership to initially lease the building and when it became clear that the school building would need more than $1,000,000.00 in renovations, they decided to purchase the building. The Archdiocese sold the school building and church to the Independence Mission Schools for $200,000.[11] By that time many of the

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[8] Ryan Briggs, "Last Mass at St. Francis in Germantown," *Hidden City* (June 26, 2012). Briggs described the congregation. " Most grew up in the neighborhood in the 50s, 60s and 70s, when this section near Wayne Junction, known to some as the Brickyard, was a working-class Irish and Italian area dotted with several Catholic institutions." Briggs continued: "The neighborhood has been increasingly populated with black residents of a generally Protestant background. They replaced the predominantly white, Catholic population whose departure from the Philadelphia (along with the aging of those who stayed) greatly diminished the parish population in recent decades." This observation can be confirmed by the United States Census for 1950 which continued to record families with parents from Ireland and Italy.

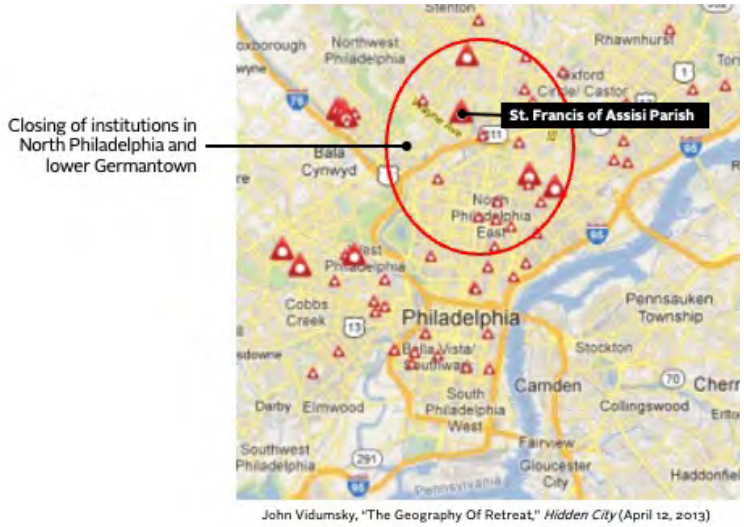
[9] Ibid.

[10] United States Census, 1950. US Census 1950 Enumeration District 71-733. The district around the St. Francis parish comprises 41 pages listing 100% white residents with by name suggests origins in Ireland and Italy. The Decennial Census for District 94-171 shows the transformation of the community with 134 households of which 125 were African American.

[10] Deed dated December 15, 2016. (Philadelphia Atlas).

Archdiocese's older churches had become white elephants, to borrow Henry James description of Victorian mansions in Newport.[12]

Across Philadelphia, churches and other religious buildings were closing – most in the poorest neighborhoods of the city.



John Vidumsky, "The Geography Of Retreat," *Hidden City* (April 12, 2013)

Churches closing prior to 2013– large triangles, Roman Catholic, small triangles, other religions, John Vidumsky. "The Geography of Retreat."

The School and the Investment in its Property

Since their purchase of the property in 2016, the trustees of the Independence Mission program who operate the DePaul School have invested heavily in updating the school building which is essential to their mission – to provide a first-class education for the children of a community that spans much of Philadelphia. A new roof and new energy-efficient windows have replaced outdated systems; new electrical services were installed and a modern high efficiency HVAC system was designed and installed to make the school comfortable. A bright mural ornaments the street façade. With these improvements and a new curriculum, at the time of purchase in December 2016, the school had nearly doubled its student population

[12] John Vidumsky, "The Geography Of Retreat," *Hidden City* (April 12, 2013) maps the closing of churches across the city in the early twenty-first century. https://hiddencityphila.org/2013/04/the-geography-of-retreat/ (accessed 06.11.26). Vidumsky noted that in the previous year, the public school system had closed eight public schools and was preparing to close 23 more; the Archdiocese had closed four schools as well as ten churches and their parish schools (one being St. Francis of Assisi); 53 churches of other faiths had recently closed as well across the region.

from 270 to more than 450.[13] But the school is limited by an undersized paved playground of the sort long out-of-date even for city schools.

In the first eight years after their purchase IMS undertook extensive research into possible uses for the building. They commissioned two local firms, first in 2021 Krieger Associates who had worked on planning for the Springside /Chestnut Hill Academy merger local schools and when their project proved too expensive, commissioned another local firm, Regan / Kline / Cross to find more cost-effective uses. Multiple projects were explored to use the church as a sports facility, as an auditorium, or a multi-purpose space. As is outlined below the costs of such a use were far beyond the institution's capacity to fund the transformation and then to fund the ongoing costs of maintain such a resource. On the other hand, the space where the church stands offered another valuable resource as an open grass playing field that would augment the paved parking lot and give the school a significant advantage in recruiting students for the future. Most significantly, in a densely built-up neighborhood space of this sort is certainly impossible to find. For urban kids, such a space would be a great treasure.

Conclusion

Given that the school has been working on this project for many years, has hired multiple design and engineering firms and expended design and engineering fees to study the building, first for the adaptive reuses and then, when those uses proved too expensive, for the demolition, consideration should be given to the primacy of their study and projected work over a late nomination. Ironically, given the SoLo Community Association's purposes: "Goal: A clean, green, safe community", the attempt to stop a "clean, green, safe" playground is contrary to their platform.[14]

[13] Martha Woodall, "Germantown deal adds DePaul Space," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (December 14th, 2016) https://www.inquirer.com/philly/education/20161215_DePaul_Catholic_School_Independence_Mission_Schools_buy_Germantown_buildings.html#loaded (accessed 11.10.26).

[14] https://www.sologermantown.com

Notes from Mark Coggin, forensic engineer, Thornton Tomasetti July 8, 2026

Mr. Coggin visited the building with George E. Thomas, Ph.D. These notes parallel those of Keast & Hood five years earlier, with accelerating damage and several important observations, most notably about the condition of the mortar in the tower which could be crushed by hand. He provided this outline of issues in the hope that it would suffice and spare the school the costs of a full document. If it is necessary to file a more complete report, Mr. Coggin's review would be augmented with additional testing of mortars and more extensive analysis of the fabric, particular in the subbasement and the perimeter walls which show significant structural deformities.

Condition of the building:

Thornton Tomasetti performed a preliminary walk though of the property and based on that visit we have the following comments:

- The condition of the masonry at the tower is generally poor. The lime-based mortar has suffered significant deterioration with the mortar materials piled at the base of the tower walls. It is surprising that the mortar materials are in such poor condition, at the time this structure was built, Portland cement-based mortar was in widespread use.
- The wood frame platforms and access stairs in the tower are also in poor condition and require reinforcement or replacement.
- The condition of the mortar in the sanctuary is most likely similar; however the plaster finish is generally in place although water damaged.
- Terra cotta fenestration and door frame components are in poor condition at many locations due to cracks and freeze/thaw damage.
- The sanctuary roof is in poor condition and in need of replacement. We understand the primary framing is steel with timber secondary framing. We were unable to access the roof framing at the time of our visit because of the collapse of a ceiling but given the condition of the roof, damage to the timber most likely exists.
- The sub-basement is flooded with several feet of water and steel floor framing above this area was corroded.
- Original stained-glass windows have been removed and replaced with plastic infills. He suspects that these infills are allowing water to enter the walls.
- Mechanical and electrical systems are not functioning and it is understood all of these systems need to be replaced. Further the building has been vacant for over ten years. This most likely has resulted in damages to any remaining finishes.

- Any adaptive reuse would have significant hurdles to overcome. The asbestos containing materials would need to be totally removed for any reuse at significant cost. In addition, conversion to a residential use would be limited due to limited window openings and the inability to modify the exterior walls to create appropriately located openings.

In an effort to preserve capital for the school, it is hoped that this general note will suffice to indicate a building in significant distress but also one that has proven to be very difficult to adapt. If it is necessary to provide a more complete analysis for the Historical Commission, this report can be expanded and correlated with the Chronology by the architects that is part of this report.

Note on the construction mortar

As Mr. Coggin notes, the loose mortar that has fallen out of the tower is of very low compressive strength such that it can literally be crushed by hand. This suggests old mortar mixes that date back to the 19th century and correlates with the collapse of a 6-story School building in Chestnut Hill by the Durang office for the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1900.

> The building is described as part of the property of the Sisters of St. Joseph: "Building 6: St Joseph's Hall: A 3 1/2 story, 16 rank, stone school bldg. with stone belt course, stone sills & arched openings, stone window hoods on the center section of 4 ranks, 2 turrets on either side of the projecting center, a porte-cochere, a hipped roof & 3 gabled stone dormers. 2 story bays exist on the outside sections. The bldg. contains an inside open rotunda. Begun in 1899, the bldg. collapsed on Nov. 20, 1900. Restarted on Mar. 20, 1902, it was completed Sept. 29, 1903" (Philadelphia Architects & Buildings https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ho_display.cfm/724845) accessed 11.10.26.

Chronological timeline of the events and documents related to the DePaul Catholic School / St. Francis of Assisi Church campus project

Steven N. Kline, RKC Architects **July 6, 2026**

2012

- The Archdiocese of Philadelphia closed the parish. The church remained vacant until the lease was executed with Victory Community Church

2013

- Major theft of approximately $60,000 worth of religious artifacts were stolen.
- November 2013: The Pastor of St. Vincent DePaul Roman Catholic Parish leased the church building to Victory Community Church. Victory held their first and only service on November 24, 2013.
- November 26, 2013: A fire occurred inside the church building on the left side of the main sanctuary.

- School leased by Independence Mission Schools from Archdiocese.

2016

- December 9, 2016: The property at 48-60 West Logan Street was sold with permission from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to Independence Mission Schools (IMS) by the Pastor of St. Vincent DePaul Roman Catholic Parish, for $200,000. The deed was officially recorded December 15, 2016. *(Document: 2016-12-15 Depaul Catholic - Deed.pdf)*

2018

- September 14 & 20, 2018: The City of Philadelphia issued Notices of Violation declaring the property and front wall of the church unsafe due to structural deterioration and a collapsed porch wall. *(Documents: 2018-09-14 & 2018-09-20 City Notices)*
- December 5 - 14, 2018: Elton & Thompson, P.C. Structural Consultants responded to the city notices regarding fire-damaged floor framing and prepared structural repair sketches (SKS-1 and SKS-2). *(Documents: 2018-12-05 & 2018-12-14 Depaul Catholic E&T)*

- December - Regan / Kline /Cross (RKC Architects) were engaged to work with engineers for the repairs and are the addressee of documents from the engineers.

2019

- Received an estimate from Kurtz Construction to repair/replace the roof on the church and rectory for $350,000. Revised estimate $650,000.00 in 2026.

2020

- In 2020 National Maintenance & Build Out Company, LLC was asked to provide an overall rough estimate of the costs of repairing and adapting the church building.

2021

- Kreiger Associates were retained to evaluate the building for adaptative reuse. They retained Keast & Hood, PE. Keast & Hood site visit March 4, 2021; report March 19, 2021 on physical conditions of building:

  "Those structural concerns include: fire damage, plaster ceiling water damage, corroding concealed steel framing, shifting/cracking exterior stair wing walls, cracked or spalling stone masonry and terra cotta, basement standing water, and mortar loss/water damage at the basement foundation wall." (Keast & Hood report)

  "At the east tower, the east wall exhibits a large crack along the underside of the floor slab/wall intersection (see Photos 10 & 11); it appears that a concrete encased steel beam is located embedded into the wall. This beam exhibits surface corrosion and is causing rust jacking (the corrosion of steel framing that applies outward pressures on the surrounding masonry causing cracking and spalling. At the west tower, the west wall exhibits similar cracking but not as extensive as the east tower." (K & H).

- Rough estimates for RACP (PA state) grant from National Maintenance & Build Out Company, LLC for costs of full repairs and adaptation to interior sport facility. (*email from NMBOC to school* **Date:** March 31, 2021 at 3:22:58 PM EDT)

  Estimate $12,500,000.00 for repairs and new uses.

- December 6, 2021: The Governor's Office of the Budget issued an authorization letter for $500,000 in Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) funding for the DePaul Campus Expansion. *(Document: Auth. Letter. $500K 12-6-2021)*

2022

- March 7, 2022: Independence Mission Schools entered into a $534,990 contract with National Maintenance & Build Out Company, LLC to furnish and install new aluminum windows and remove existing baseboard heaters for the school building. *(Document: 2022-03-17 National Mntnc & Build Out - window replacement contract.pdf)*
- May 11, 2022: A second authorization letter was issued for an additional $500,000 in RACP funding, bringing the total Commonwealth commitment to $1,000,000. *(Document: Auth. Letter. $500K 5-11-22)*
- August 16, 2022: Bickings Electric submitted a proposal for $197,004.64 to upgrade electrical services, which included demolishing existing equipment and running a new pole to the transformer for the school building. *(Document: 2022-08-16 Bickings Electric)*

2023

- March 16 - April 19, 2023: The Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) approved and subsequently issued an award letter for a $250,000 Local Share Account (LSA) grant for the Church Renovation Project. *(Document: 2023-04-19 LSA grant award letter & contract)*
- March 27, 2023: Littleton Contractors proposed $13,600.00 to excavate for an electrical vault and utility pole for the school building. *(Document: 2023-03-27 Littleton excavation)*
- April 10 - 12, 2023: J. A. Young Engineers submitted a proposal for $320,100.00 to install a new Daikin VRV HVAC system for the classrooms and cafeteria, which was accepted by IMS. *(Document: 2023-04-10 JA Young HVAC)*
- April 28, 2023: NE Contractors proposal to replace the roof on the school building was submitted and accepted by IMS. Work was completed in 2023.
- April 25 - May 11, 2023: The LSA state grant contract was officially signed and executed by PIDC Financing Corporation and Commonwealth officials. *(Document: 2023-04-19 LSA grant award letter & contract)*
- May 17, 2023: IMS formally accepted the Bickings Electric proposals for both the $42,000 transformer vault and the $197,004.64 electrical service upgrade for the school building. *(Document: 2023-05-17 Bickings Elec)*

2024

- January 9 & 23, 2024: Premier Building Restoration submitted a $67,142.10 proposal for priority facade repairs for the church and rectory buildings, which was accepted by IMS on January 23. *(Document: 2024-01-09 Premier Bldg Restoration)*
- April 1 - June 3, 2024: Regan Kline Cross (RKC) Architects submitted a $166,916 proposal for architectural services to convert the church sanctuary into a multi-purpose room; the contract was executed by IMS on June 3. *(Document: 2024-04-01 RKC proposal)*
- June 2024: USA Environmental performed an Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) and Hazardous Building Material (HBM) study for the proposed renovation of the church and rectory buildings. A report was submitted to IMS on June 27, 2024. Composite floor tile on the lower level tested positive for asbestos and would need to be abated before renovations. A budget line item of $150,000 for asbestos removal was entered into the renovation construction budget.
- August 2, 2024: RKC Architects issued "Issued for Permit" architectural drawings detailing the facade stabilization work. *(Document: 2024-08-02 Church Facade Repair)*
- September 26 - October 15, 2024: RKC Architects produced multiple schematic layout schemes for the campus connection of the school building to the church building. Schematic designs were also developed to renovate the church to be utilized as a multi-purpose room (gym, auditorium, morning attendance). *(Document: 2024-09-26 Schematic updated)*
- November 25, 2024: A project email discussed selective demolition and total demolition budget costs for the church building, specifying the cost of taking the steeple tower down to the pitched roof. This was explored to reduce the total building height below the height where a periodic (every five years) facade and roof inspection and correction action plan is required. The concern was the ongoing repair costs of the facade and slate roof would grow exponentially as time went on and IMS was concerned about this ongoing maintenance costs. *(Document: 2024-11-25 Littleton email demo budget costs)*. This is the first time that demolition of the entire building was considered.

  > “I need two prices:
  > “Demolition of the entire Church/ Rectory building – this can be a good ballpark number as they are evaluating whether to demolish the building or renovate it as a multi-purpose space for the school.

> Partial demolition cost for taking the taller tower down to the top of the peaked roof…"

2025

- January - April 2025: after several discussions with the school's advisory committee and administration it was determined that the cost to renovate and maintain the existing church building would be too costly. It was determined that the approximate $4.5 million renovation budget plus the projected ongoing maintenance and repairs of the building on a yearly basis is beyond the school's capabilities. Discussions began about the potential of razing the buildings and developing an enhanced schoolyard and playing field for the school.

- April 25, 2025 Robert E. Blue, Jr. Consulting engineers provides proposal letter for demolition scope and demolition permits. (*Document Blue to Steven Kline, RKC architects*)
- June 20, 2025: Following exhaustive analysis, Steven N. Kline (RKC Architects) noted in a project narrative that saving the church building was financially unfeasible. The strategy shifted to razing the building to construct an enhanced schoolyard and grass playing field. *(Document: 2025-06-20 SNK recast narrative email)*
- August 7 - 19, 2025: Elizabeth Alfonsi formally emailed PIDC to recast the RACP grant based on the new demolition strategy. *(Documents: 2025-08-07 P. Silow email & 2025-08-22 SNK recast narrative email)*
- October 9, 2025: Updated RDA-300 forms were submitted to PIDC reflecting the new project scope for the recasting of the RACP grants. *(Document: 2025-10-09 RACP recast email)*

2026

- January 5, 2026: An RFP was issued for the asbestos abatement per the report prepared by USA Environmental in June 2024.
- January 12 - 15, 2026: Steven N. Kline provided LSA budget estimates, listing Asbestos Abatement at $125,000, Civil Engineering at $80,000, and Architecture at $60,000. Peter Silow confirmed that the abatement and A&E costs would be accepted for the LSA grant, but stormwater work was excluded. *(Document: 2026-01-15 ACM 1st bid mtg email)*
- February 2026: USA Environmental performed additional ACM and HBM testing since the scope of work has changed from renovation to demolition of the buildings. A revised report was submitted to IMS on February 5, 2026. Most of the plaster in

the church and the entry lobby tested positive for asbestos. Also, asbestos heat shields were discovered behind the radiators behind the wood paneling in the sanctuary. This discovery substantially changed the scope of abatement for the demolition of the church.

- February 23, 2026: An RFP was issued to demolition contractors for the demolition of the church and rectory building.
- February 2026: An addendum was submitted to the asbestos abatement contractors with the revised ACM and HBM study prepared by USA Environmental in February 2026. Revised abatement proposal would be due on March 20, 2026.
- March 20, 2026: Asbestos abatement proposals were received for the revised scope. The cost of the abatement scope of work increased from a range $69,000 - $86,000 to a revised range from $860,000 - $1,389,000.
- March 20 2026: Building demolition proposals were received. Proposals ranged from $1,441,000 to $1,609,300.
- April 13, 2026: Gianna R. D'Angelo formally signed the $45,300 civil engineering and permitting contract with Robert E. Blue Consulting Engineers. *(Document: 2026-04-15 REB signed)*
- April 20, 2026: Kurtz Construction revised their estimate from 2019 to replace the church roof. The quoted cost is $575,000.

Since April 20, 2026, Civic**Visions** LP and Mark Coggin, PE, of Thornton Tomasetti have been retained as expert consultants. To save resources for the school, they have undertaken abbreviated reports that would be filled in with additional detail if required by the full commission.

Appendix: Philadelphia Institutions with Parallel Issues

Pennsylvania School for the Deaf

Across Philadelphia, other institutions with similarly limited resources have been in the same quandary. In 2019, the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf acquired a minor and much damaged and altered house adjacent to its school campus. Acquisition of the building would make it possible to replan its core campus by removing vehicle parking and traffic from areas crossed by deaf students and faculty. A safer campus would result for the deaf population while also providing a site on campus, previously used for parking, that could be used for its first deaf-designed and focused new building. Despite the positive value of the site for the future of the school and its minor design significance (a judge viewed it as "a low value historic building"), the Philadelphia Historical Commission accepted a nomination.



School for the Deaf - animal gnawed trim boards, rotted columns, boarded up windows

After years of hearings in different formats beginning with lawyers and consultants preparing documents for multiple hearings by the designation committee and then the full commission, historic status was approved. Later hearings, at significant additional costs for professional services, addressed the hardship of the designation for the school, with the final determination that designation was "not in the public interest."[15] Nonetheless, the house still has not been demolished because the commission required community support for the necessary institutional zoning – which the neighbors have threatened to withhold. Once again the judicial decision is

[15] Kyle Bagenstose, "Court OKs Demolition of Boxwood, but Preservationists Vow to Fight On," *Hidden City*, (March 24, 2026) https://hiddencityphila.org/2026/03/court-oks-demolition-of-boxwood-but-preservationists-vow-to-fight-on/

being appealed. Instead of a revised and transformed School for the Deaf, the school continues to labor with the same risks – and the improved campus has yet to appear.

Church of the Assumption, Siloam Wellness

A similar case occurred nearly a generation earlier when the Archdiocese sold the Roman Catholic Church of the Assumption and its parish house on the 1100 block of Spring Garden Street to Siloam Wellness, an HIV/ AIDS rehab institution.[16] A nomination was filed in 2009, on the very day that the under-contract demolition contractor had placed temporary protective fencing around the site prior to the beginning of demolition. Like the Independence Mission Schools, the Siloam organization had been forced to accept the church building when it purchased their site in 2006. The Archdiocese had closed the church in 1995 but had held on to the site until the Phillies finally decided not to build their new ballpark in the center of the city in 2000. When that decision was finalized, the Archdiocese sold the property to Siloam Wellness, the tenant, that was renting the parish house – with the church building thrown in for nothing.

An engineer's report noted significant structural deficiencies in the church building and the consultant's report noted the removal of most of the stained glass, the church furniture and most of the interior fittings as well as the deteriorating wood (instead of stone) columns of the nave arcade. The façade was on its third coat of stucco, each in different colors; the spires that had been once been slated were now clad in copper. Together with the loss of most of its stained-glass windows, the building had suffered significant losses of integrity. Nonetheless, the last-minute nomination was accepted. The commission decided that based on the fact that Katharine Drexel, later sainted, had been baptized in the church, and the fact that the church had a known architect, it warranted designation – despite the efforts that Siloam had already made to find an alternate use, then plan for demolition and eventually receive a state grant that would fund a demolition contractor. A local developer acquired the property from Siloam but has never been able to undertake the project. The building has continued to deteriorate.

Other sites including the western and southern missions associated with Katharine Drexel's foundation of the Sisters of the Blessed Covenant for Indians and Colored

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[16] Kyle Bagenstose, "Historic Church of the Assumption Heads to Sheriff's Sale," *Hidden City* (March 27, 2025) https://hiddencityphila.org/2025/03/historic-church-of-the-assumption-heads-to-sheriffs-sale/ (accessed 6.26.26).

and the motherhouse of the order in nearby Bensalem, designed by the important Philadelphia architect Charles Burns, would have better memorialized her significance. This particular site likely would not have met the National Register standards for association with a significant person. The added costs of maintaining and preserving the church building forced Siloam Wellness to abandon their service facility and to sell the complex to a local developer.[17] The organization nearly went bankrupt in the process.



Church of the Assumption, 1300 block Spring Garden Street in 2009 with demolition fence around church (Google Streetview, 2009)

Seventeen years after the nomination, the developer is in bankruptcy and the building, still unmaintained, remains and is up for sheriff's sale.[18]

[17] Ali Roseberry-Polier, "Nation's Largest AIDS-Wellness Center on the Verge of Closing," Hidden City (April 23, 2019) https://hiddencityphila.org/2019/04/nations-largest-aids-wellness-center-on-the-verge-of-closing/

[18] The National Register of Historic Places designates buildings for individuals when that building is the most significant to their life and activities. In the case of Katharine Drexel, other sites including centers that she created for the care of Blacks and Native Americans, as well as her tomb in Philadelphia's Cathedral would be more likely choices.