



# PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

*for greater philadelphia*

July 6, 2020

Robert Thomas, Chairman  
Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director  
Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

RE: St. Laurentius Church, 1600-06 E. Berks Street, Philadelphia, PA

Dear Bob and Jon,

I am writing in reference to the emergency application that was submitted to the Philadelphia Historical Commission on July 3, 2020 for the complete demolition of the above-referenced property. This property was added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 2015 on the basis of its history, architecture and importance to the Polish Catholic community in Philadelphia.

We understand that this matter appears on the agenda of the monthly meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission scheduled for this Friday, July 10. As we continue our review of the demolition application, we believe that the Commission should consider the following questions:

- Why was this application not referred first to the Architectural Committee, which exists in part to offer technical expertise in the review of applications that seek to alter or demolish historic properties?
- Why is no mention made in either the application or in the attached engineering reports of the expenditure of \$135,000 by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia last summer to address the building's structural problems? (This was reported in January on Inquirer.com <https://www.inquirer.com/news/st-laurentius-church-fishtown-sells-new-developer-humberto-fernandini-archdiocese-preservation-20200115.html>).
- What impact did the above-referenced repairs have in addressing the issues detailed in the application?
- What evidence of structural failure was observed by the Harman Group and Thornton Tomasetti that is new since last summer's repairs by the Archdiocese?
- Why does the application call for the complete demolition of this historic property if the engineering reports only address structural problems with one or both steeples?
  - In fact, neither engineer's report included with the application says that complete demolition is necessary.
- Why is no financial information provided about the cost of either stabilizing the steeples and/or removing them to abate the purported dangerous condition?

We recognize that this building is part of a dense urban neighborhood. We are aware of the fact that prior inspections have revealed structural concerns. We believe that public safety comes first and that the owner and the City of Philadelphia must ensure that public safety is ensured at all times. But the rush to seek a demolition permit with barely a week's notice and incomplete documentation requires that the foregoing questions, and others that the Commission may deem to ask, need to be answered before the fate of this irreplaceable historic property is decided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Steinke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Steinke  
Executive Director