



Friends of Warrendale & Save Historic St. Andrew's

May 14, 2019

City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. West, 310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Re: Ord. 19-1, St. Andrew's Church Heritage Preservation Site Designation

Dear Council Members:

Is there a sacred place in your life?

A special refuge like the Boundary Waters, the Mississippi River, Gooseberry Falls, or Lake Superior?

An outdoor space like Indian Mounds Park or Rice Park or Como Park?

Or maybe it's the Como Zoo, the Highland Water Tower, or Landmark Center?

And, if you are a person of faith, perhaps it's a building like the majestic Saint Paul Cathedral, Summit Avenue's House of Hope Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis's historic Temple of Israel, or a local mosque.

Imagine if all of those places were gone.

Some of you who serve on the Council fled war-ravaged lands where all of the sacred places in your original homeland may have been destroyed.

Or, quite possibly, you are descended from those who came to our shores to escape famine, abject poverty, and religious persecution.

Whatever your heritage or cultural background, our local landscape is full of stories about community devastation—and often it came about through the wholesale destruction of neighborhoods as part of “urban renewal,” or the random demolition of historic properties in the name of “progress.”

If nothing else, the historic preservation movement of the last half-century has taught us that sacrificing sacred spaces that can be preserved and repurposed is bad public policy that we often regret years later. (Take a look some time at architectural historian Larry Millett's *Lost Twin Cities* and the four-volume documentary series it inspired on TPT if you think otherwise.)

That's why we hope you will keep in mind both the architectural significance and cultural history of the former St. Andrew's Church when you consider the recommendation by the city's Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) at tomorrow's public hearing.

We also remind Council Members that in a Dec. 11, 2018 letter, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) informed the HPC that "we concur that St. Andrew's Church is an ideal candidate for local designation." Additionally, in a letter dated March 21, 2019, SHPO advised our organization that it believed the State Historic Preservation Review Board would support an application for including St. Andrew's on the National Register of Historic Places.

As you are aware, the current occupant of the building—the Twin Cities German Immersion School (TCGIS)—believes that historic designation is inappropriate. Sadly, the school's administration, board, and several parents have resorted to insults, public attacks, and outright misinformation regarding maintenance and renovation costs in an attempt to marginalize our efforts. Imagine if a traditional Saint Paul public school addressed programmatic changes or building projects in this fashion?

TCGIS has also claimed, unfairly, that we are putting "buildings before children"—going so far as to state that we have "weaponized" the historic designation process to block the school's expansion goals. In truth, one can cheer on a school's success while also recognizing that there are limits to what can be achieved in a neighborhood setting without dramatically altering the character of that neighborhood. Unfortunately, this outcome will be unavoidable if TCGIS is allowed to meet its self-inflicted space needs by tearing down an iconic building that has stood for nearly one hundred years and has great historic and cultural significance.

Saving historic buildings is a time-honored tradition that has the support of most states and local governments, is backed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and is a preference enshrined in both the City's and District 10's Comprehensive Plans. The notion that taking action to preserve a historic building is some kind of nefarious activity is patently absurd.

In fact, at least thirteen former churches in the St. Paul area have been effectively repurposed, including a recent renovation by another charter school, Academia Cesar Chavez.

We are also troubled by the school's exaggerated claims that the "former church is falling apart," repeated most recently in a May 10th letter sent to you by attorney Marc Manderscheid on behalf of TCGIS. In that letter, Manderscheid states that "to eliminate the current leaking and water infiltration from the St. Andrew's roof, it will be necessary to remove all of the clay tiles and to install a new waterproof membrane at a cost estimated to be more than \$1 million." However, just a year ago, TCGIS claimed that replacing the roof would "cost between \$500,00 and \$750,000." How did the price suddenly skyrocket?

We can find no evidence of any maintenance performed by TCGIS to address alleged water leakage problems. A well-regarded roofing company hired by SHSA came up with a significantly lower repair estimate. They also pointed out that clay tile will last for ages if cared for properly—and that individual tiles or sections can be replaced instead of tearing off the entire roof as TCGIS insists is necessary. (Our research shows the St. Andrew's parish maintained the roof for about \$1,500/year.)

The reality is that whatever deterioration may exist to the building's exterior is primarily cosmetic in nature, and due almost entirely to the school's unwillingness to use any of its budget for upkeep of its property. For TCGIS to now insist that routine maintenance is a burden it cannot bear is an incredulous assertion, given that just six years ago the school used \$8.2 million of conduit HRA bond funding to purchase and rehab the church and school building.

Attorney Manderscheid also asserts that the former St. Andrew's is a "special purpose property" characterized as having "physical design features peculiar to a specific use," "no apparent market other than to an owner-user," and that "the property has no feasible economic alternate use." While St. Andrew's may indeed have been originally constructed to serve only a religious function, (as mentioned above) numerous churches in the Twin Cities area have been successfully repurposed.

Some of these noteworthy properties include SteppingStone Theater (formerly Saint Volodymyr & Olga Ukrainian Orthodox Church); the Summit Center for Arts and Innovation (formerly Saint Paul's Episcopal Church-On-the-Hill); and the Ramsey Professional Building at the base of Ramsey Hill (formerly the German Presbyterian Bethlehem Church).

As we will demonstrate at Wednesday's hearing, such re-use options that might meet the school's additional space needs are possible for St. Andrew's as well. Unfortunately, TCGIS has refused to explore those alternatives with the community, claiming instead that an "exhaustive" two-year planning process revealed no feasible solution except razing the church sanctuary and building anew.

In fact, whatever planning the school did around expansion was compressed into a four-month period during late 2017 and early 2018 in which no community input was sought, tearing down St. Andrew's a forgone conclusion, and the hiring of an architect to design a new building already in the works while the school publicly claimed to still be "weighing" its options. We plan to share those details as well.

We urge the City Council to follow the recommendations of both the HPC and SHPO and designate the former St. Andrew's Church as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site. Not only will doing so respect the integrity of the work these independent bodies perform, conferring historic designation on St. Andrew's will force TCGIS to finally engage in a genuine collaborative process that might achieve a positive win-win for the school and the neighborhood.

To do otherwise will merely exacerbate an incredibly divisive issue that has already turned some neighbors against one another and caused many to lose faith in a public process where improper influence seemed evident when the Planning Commission deliberated this matter. Here's a perfect opportunity to restore some integrity to planning decisions by objectively considering the data offered by a committed group of neighbors with limited resources—versus being persuaded by misinformation presented as truth by lawyers, PR firms, and paid lobbyists.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the arguments and concerns we have raised here.

Sincerely,



Teri Alberico
President



Bonnie Youngquist
Vice-President