



401 F ST, NW, ROOM 324
WASHINGTON, DC 20001

TEL: 202/783-5144
FAX: 202/783-5596

John D. Bellingham, FCIQB, FAIC, CEnv
President

John Sandor
Vice President

Laura Vowell
Treasurer

James A. Smailes, P.E.
Secretary

Shalom Baranes, FAIA
Sean C. Cahill
John F. Clark, Esq.
Jacqueline Corbett
Edward D. Dunson, AIA
Colden Florance, FAIA
Constance Maffin, GRI
Donald Beekman Myer, FAIA
Susan D. Neumann
Andrew Potts, Esq.
Deborah Royster
D. Peter Sefton
Chuck Wagner

Rebecca A. Miller
Executive Director

Erik M. Hein
Program Coordinator

The mission of the DC Preservation League is to preserve, protect, and enhance the historic and built environment of Washington, DC, through advocacy

July 24, 2008

Tersh Boasberg, Chair
Historic Preservation Review Board
801 North Capitol Street, NE, Suite 3000
Washington, DC 20002
Chair Boasberg and Members of the Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to the proposed raze permit for the church building located within the Third Church of Christ, Scientist complex at 900 16th Street, NW. I am the Executive Director of the District of Columbia Preservation League (DCPL), an organization dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the historic environment of Washington, DC.

The structure under review is a Modernist church that was designed by Araldo Cusutto of the acclaimed I.M. Pei & Partners architectural firm. In 1974, just three years after its completion, the church was included in the *Guide to the Architecture of Washington, DC* published by the American Institute of Architects. It also earned awards from the Washington Board of Trade and the Washington Building Congress.

In December, 2007, the Historic Preservation Review Board recognized that the church building easily met the statutory criteria for landmark designation by unanimously granting it landmark status. While some within the community opposed the landmark designation – most notably the Trustees of the Church and a commercial developer that owns the land underlying the church – others strongly support its preservation. In fact, dozens of letters in support of the designation were received from architects, architectural historians, heads of architecture schools and historic preservation programs, and organizations focused on preserving the recent past.

But divergent views regarding the church's landmark designation can be put aside today because the only matter before the Board is a discreet issue that is just as clear-cut as the landmark designation. That issue is simply whether demolition of the church is compatible with the purposes of the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Act. The Act itself makes those purposes clear. They are to retain and enhance historic properties, encourage the adaptation of historic properties for current use, and ensure that changes to designated properties are compatible with their historic character. The raze permit application before the Board requests demolition of a designated historic landmark. The application is therefore totally incompatible with the

purposes of the Act. Accordingly, DCPL urges the Board to adopt the Historic Preservation Office Staff Report and deny the raze permit application.

In closing, DCPL comments that the District's preservation law encourages the adaptation of landmarks for current use. Yet, since the church's designation, no plan or proposal – aside from a request to completely demolish the structure – has been submitted to the HPO for review. Given its location and modern architectural significance, the building has potential for a variety of uses – spiritual, charitable, community, commercial, mixed, or otherwise. DCPL respectfully encourages representatives of the church and the developers to meet with HPO staff to explore opportunities for adaptive re-use of the site.

Thank you for your time.

Rebecca Miller
Executive Director