

Sharing the Journey

Duncan McIntosh, Minister of Proclamation

March 15, 2011

Ms. Leslie Miles, Chairman
Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission
8787 Georgia Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: First Baptist Church of Silver Spring

Dear Chairman Miles:

On behalf of the First Baptist Church of Silver Spring, MD, the purpose of this letter is to express the Church's strong objection to the Silver Spring Historical Society's ("SSHS") nomination of the Church's buildings, located at 8415 Fenton Street in downtown Silver Spring (the "Property"), for designation on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation (the "Master Plan") or the Locational Atlas (the "Atlas"). As set forth in the report dated March 15, 2011, prepared by David S. Rotenstein, Ph.D, RPA and submitted into the record of this proceeding, the buildings meet none of the criteria for designation in the Master Plan or Locational Atlas under applicable County law. Moreover, the inclusion of all or a portion of the buildings in the Master Plan or the Atlas, or any regulation of the redevelopment of the property for historic preservation purposes, will prevent the Church from proceeding with the proposed redevelopment of the Property that the Church is currently pursuing. The plans for redevelopment will provide the Church with new facilities on the Property as part of a mixed-use project and allow the Church to continue its mission in the community.

We believe it is important that you understand why we need to replace these buildings with new, more suitable facilities for our ministries and mission. In this regard, there are significant functional inadequacies for this Federation of three churches in Silver Spring. The current building lacks spaces to accommodate the activities of a federation of churches that want to do education and worship simultaneously in three languages (English, Spanish and Creole/French). Such an arrangement is crucial to keep the youth who Anglicize from public school environments and soon seek to disassociate from the "foreign language" congregation of their birth. Simultaneous education allows children through young adults to take classes in English as

they are able while adults will have classes in English, Spanish, French or Creole. Together they would offer their members and the wider community worship opportunities in the same three languages. Our new plan will allow for sound-proofed worship spaces and adequate age-graded and language-separated class rooms.

Rotting wood and the danger of breaking asbestos tiles and insulation materials has forced us to close off the upper half of the 1925 parsonage. Water seepage at times of heavy rainfall causes serious mold problems in the 1941 building and the lower level of the 1956 building. Water seeps up through the ground-level slab of the 1941 building and permeates the porous east walls of the 1956 Fellowship Hall causing minor flooding. To a limited degree we control the mold by frequent use of dryers and very frequent carpet cleaning.

Only a small part of the 1956 building is handicapped accessible. The three distinct buildings in our complex are joined by steps preventing movement of wheelchairs and handicapped persons from building to building. Handicapped persons are confined to two areas in the upper (Worship Center) and the lower (Fellowship Hall) levels of the 1956 building. If elevators could be installed in the other two buildings, a handicapped person would have to exit the 1956 building to the parking lot and go around the buildings to Wayne Avenue where they could enter at ground-level door to access another elevator to go up or down in the other two buildings. But, they could not go from one building to the other inside the complex of buildings unless we install single level lifts at each level separation. However, these installations would require extensive building modifications because of very limited space in the stairways.

The current facility greatly limits our capacity to do some church programs and community ministries we consider essential to our mission. The church operates a weekday pre-school educational program, providing an essential service to the local community which eliminates rooms for adult programs such as literacy and language training. Though we have personnel who are fully qualified to run such ministries, we do not have adequate space to house them. Other programs are equally handicapped. All three buildings were built primarily as worship centers as the church grew over a period of four decades. When the second building was built, the first was adapted to Sunday School. When the third building was built, the 1st and 2nd buildings were adapted to Sunday School and weekday education. Today, our adult programs are limited to use of the Fellowship Hall, which is partitioned by aged folding walls that are mostly inoperable.

We also operate a Food Closet that serves over 40 families each Saturday morning, but it does not have adequate indoor space for people to gather as they wait for the distributions. When it is cold and/or wet, people stand in lines outside for 10 to 20 minutes.

Any one of a number of serious maintenance issues could more than wipe out all the church's current financial reserves!

1. About 6 years ago we lost the only "green" component of our HVAC when the 8,000 gallon under-ground tank to store chilled water sprung a leak creating a minor sinkhole under the pre-school play ground and the foundation of the 1941 building. The aged HVAC runs, thanks to prayer and skilled technicians who "jerry-rig" or custom craft parts such as pumps because they are no longer manufactured.
2. All the crash-bars on external doors have to be repaired at least twice a year because the springs are stressed and break after a few openings. Again, the age of the doors means that crash-bars of their sizes are no longer manufactured. Thus parts must be hand-crafted at considerable cost. Also, the rotting wood on the doors must be patched because the doors are not stocked sizes or designs in any catalog today.

I could go on with the fire-alarm system, total roofing, replacing internal water pipes that are filled with pin-holes, aged windows that do not close or keep out drafts, a kitchen that is decades out of date, storm drains that flood us instead of clearing away water, and inadequate handicapped accessible toilets. But, for the Church, the primary problem is the total inadequacy of the buildings for ministries in downtown Silver Spring in the 21st century.

These inadequacies were also noted by the restoration architect brought to the buildings in 2005 by the Silver Spring Historical Society. In addition to concluding that our main building had no historical significance, he pointed out that even if we could get the \$5 million (more now) to bring the buildings up to code, we would still only have a 1950s building that would not adequately serve the needs of an urban church in 2000.

This same conclusion is drawn by Partners for Sacred Places, the organization suggested by the Historical Society to help us fund restoration. As national director for Church Planting for the American Baptist Churches in the USA from 1984 to 1997, I worked with the Historical Trust and Partners for Sacred Places on numerous projects across the country. Their first question is, "If restored, will this building serve the mission needs of this congregation for the next 25 years?" Because our buildings do not meet their test, they will not recommend or assist restoration.

In summary, if our buildings are placed on the Master Plan or Historic Atlas, or otherwise subject to regulation for historic preservation purposes in the event of redevelopment, it would be prohibitively expensive for our congregations to bring the buildings up to code. Even if we

could afford that financial outlay, we would be strapped with buildings that would inhibit faithful fulfillment of our Christian call to mission and ministry. The members of First Baptist Church have repeatedly affirmed their strong commitment to continue our ministries in downtown Silver Spring. For that reason we have chosen to rebuild on our current property rather than take flight to a more distant location such as the New Hampshire Avenue corridor north of Colesville that is already jammed with religious groups that had been driven from the inner city.

Further, the members of the three congregations associated at First Baptist Church want to make the Federation a reality because it will demonstrate the best of and for Silver Spring and Lower Montgomery County by cooperation across racial, linguistic and cultural lines.

As you consider this matter, we urge you to make the decision that will free us to continue serving this growing city rather than be forced to abandon our mission, our dream and our hope for continuing to be a redemptive catalyst in our city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Duncan McIntosh", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Duncan McIntosh, Pastor

C: Mr. Scott Whipple, Historic Preservation Supervisor
Tom Peddicord, Moderator, First Baptist Church
Rosemary Piercey, Trustee Chair, First Baptist Church
John Rosecrans, Architect for First Baptist Church
Josh Adler, Partner, LaKritz/Adler Development Co.
Scott C. Wallace, Attorney, Linowes & Blocher