



May 12, 2014

Denver City Council
1437 Bannock Street
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Members of City Council,

We are writing regarding the designation of the Beth Eden Baptist Church at 3241 Lowell Boulevard. Historic Denver believes that the preservation of Beth Eden Baptist Church will contribute to the dynamic between old and new in West Highland and create interest and vibrancy in our city. The Beth Eden Church presents this opportunity as new development takes shape around it. Additionally, the former church is a beloved local landmark that clearly meets several of the designation criteria as confirmed unanimously by the Landmark Preservation Commission on April 1, 2014.

As you are all probably aware, this property has been at the center of community debate for the last couple of years. Historic Denver first became aware of development plans for the site in 2011 when we met with the developer involved at that time. The project presented to us involved the preservation and incorporation of the historic Beth Eden Church, specifically the currently standing 1931 sanctuary, into a new multi-family complex that included a connected structure on Lowell, as well as buildings on two nearby parcels on Moncrief and Meade Streets.

In 2011 our Preservation Committee agreed that the developer had elected to do what we wish more developers would do- include a historic structure in a new project. Therefore Historic Denver did not become further involved even when controversy over the density of the new project ensued, as we were assured of the structure's reuse by the fact that the parcel on which the 1931 sanctuary sits did not have a Certificate of Non-Historic status. However, in early 2014 we learned that circumstances related to this project had changed when a Certificate of Non-Historic status was posted on the building.

Because it has been the consistent position of Historic Denver that the church building should remain, we engaged in the designation process. However, we do not take this rare action without strong community support, and in this case there are 8 co-applicants from the neighborhood, including those involved in Friends of West Highland Landmarks, formed in 2012. Additionally, we hosted a petition and more than 400 Denver residents, including 280 who live within 1 mile of the church, have signed on in support of preserving the 1931 church structure.

Throughout this process we have done our best to work with the other parties involved, most importantly the ownership group. We have had more than one meeting to discuss how to safeguard

the church building and still provide flexibility to the owner so that both the neighborhood and the property can benefit from its history, design quality, and unique character. These meetings were cordial and constructive. In fact, we want to thank the owner for their good faith efforts. However, because of specific constraints in this particular situation, including the tight timeline required by this process, we now believe the cleanest and quickest resolution for all involved lies in the designation process and council's final vote on the matter next week.

We of course recognize that the building will undergo modifications as it is transformed by a new use as part of the development which includes the adjacent parcels. We believe there is significant flexibility within the city's design guidelines to accommodate necessary changes, as the Denver Landmark Commission regularly works with owners to find solutions for developing historic properties. There are many examples of this flexibility, not the least of which is Union Station, where approved changes include new door cuts, roof dormers, and more in order to accommodate its new hotel use. Furthermore, we have expressed to the owner that we are willing to work collaboratively if designation is granted to find creative solutions for the building's reuse, including supporting appropriate amendments to the designation if needed.

We are also pleased to announce that last week, through our efforts and the efforts of partners statewide, the Colorado Legislature passed House Bill 1311, significantly improving the incentives for the rehabilitation of designated historic structures. Governor Hickenlooper will sign the bill this coming Wednesday. The owner or future developer of the Beth Eden site will be eligible for this program if the building is designated, making designation an attractive investment decision.

We are grateful for the time many of you have taken to understand this situation, and for your consideration on May 19th. As you know, Historic Denver strives to be a thoughtful and collaborative partner in our community, and if a realistic alternative to designation existed within the current parameters and the 120-day timeline we'd happily explore it. However, in this instance we believe it is in the best interest of all parties that the issue be resolved at City Council on May 19.

Please feel free to contact me or another member of the applicant team with any questions you may have, and again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



John Olson
Director of Preservation Programs



Carla McConnell
Chair, Preservation Committee