



December 20, 2023

City of Lancaster City Council
120 N Duke St
Lancaster, PA 17608

RE: Demolition of 801 N Prince St

Dear Council Member,

I am writing to bring to your attention the demolition permit that was issued for 801 N Prince St on September 28, 2023, bypassing all historic preservation oversight provided by the City of Lancaster Heritage Conservation district ordinance, the Historical Commission, and City Council for demolition within the district.

This property is the site of the former Gunzenhauser Bakery and was damaged by fire in 1999 and has remained in a state of disrepair since the fire. In 2003 Charter Homes purchased the property and several plans for development have not reached fruition. There was an engineering inspection in 2003 and since then the building has been allowed to deteriorate from the elements and time.

In January 2023, the same engineering firm that inspected the building in 2003 conducted a new inspection of the structure. The updated report concluded that the building remains in a similar condition as in 2003 and that it would be economically infeasible to bring it up to modern building code requirements. The engineer did state that, "the condition of the building structural systems and other components render the building in imminent danger of collapse."

We at the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County agree that public safety is paramount and should be considered before all other factors, including historic preservation. However, it appears that Charter Homes did not act on the January 2023 report until September 14, 2023, when they applied for the demolition permit, which is concerning if the building is unstable and in imminent danger of collapse. From the exterior, there appears to have been no significant shifts or changes in the condition of the building.

The Historic Preservation Trust is concerned that the urgency of collapse is perhaps not immediate and that this was simply a way to use the public safety portion of the Lancaster City Code, Chapter 16 of the PA Uniform Construction Code, and the 2018 International Existing Building Code to circumvent the Heritage Conservation district ordinance. Perhaps the Trust's concerns are misplaced. Regardless, an

appropriate review by the relevant City agencies and authorities should be made. Accordingly, the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County respectfully asks the Council to pause the demolition permit to allow the appropriate review and oversight of a historically significant building within the Heritage Conservation district. According to the demolition permit, the work was supposed to be completed by November 2, 2023, but the disconnection of the utilities to the building may have delayed this process. During this delay, the Historical Commission and City Council would have time to review the proposed demolition, hear from Charter Homes and their engineer, and also hear from concerned citizens. The Historic Preservation Trust's concern is that not allowing the official review process to proceed potentially sets a bad precedent that could be used to circumvent the historic preservation protections in the City of Lancaster, protections that are widely acknowledged to have greatly contributed to the vibrancy and success that the City has enjoyed.

Additionally, the Historic Preservation Trust wants to note that the site in question is the former site of an African American enclave known as Feagleyville. In March of 2015 the African American Historical Society of South Central Pennsylvania wrote a letter to Mayor Gray notifying him of the history of the site, offering help in retaining and preserving the archeological record of possibly the oldest predominantly African American neighborhood in the City, and requesting the installation of an interpretive display to be shared on the site once it is developed. With your help and oversight, we can help to make sure this history is not lost to the new development and is more widely known. More information can be found at: [AAHS-ProposalRD-to-City-FeagleyvilleSite3-11-15.pdf](#) ([undergroundrroriginspa.org](#))

Please contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

James Brown, President



CC: Mayor Sorace