

**NOMINATION OF THE ST JOHN VIANNEY CHURCH TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK**

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

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**ST. JOHN VIANNEY CHURCH - HISTORIC NOMINATION STAFF REPORT**

**Name of Property** ..... St. John Vianney Church  
**Address of Property** ..... 225 Allen Street  
**Property Owner** ..... Diocese of Pittsburgh  
**Nominated by:**..... Mark Wittman  
**Date Received:**..... 9 June 2020  
**Parcel No.:** ..... 14-F-209  
**Ward:**..... 18th  
**Zoning Classification:**..... R1D-H  
**Neighborhood**..... Allentown  
**Council District:**..... 3 - Kraus

**FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION:**

1. Act on the Preliminary Determination of Eligibility for Historic Designation (1 July 2020)
2. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (5 Aug 2020)
3. Review the Report prepared by staff for the property in question, and make a recommendation to the City Council on the Historic Designation (5 Aug 2020)

**FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION:**

4. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (15 Sept 2020)
5. Review the recommendations of the Historic Review Commission and make a recommendation to the City Council on the Historic Designation (15 Sept 2020)

**FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE CITY COUNCIL:**

6. Conduct a public hearing within 120 days of the Planning Commission vote
7. Review the recommendations of the Historic Review Commission and the City Planning Commission and take action on the Historic Designation

## FACTS

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1. On June 9, 2020, the staff of the Historic Review Commission received an application for the nomination of the St. John Vianney Church to be designated as a City Historic Structure.
2. **Description of the St. John Vianney Church** (as extracted from the nomination form)

### Location and Siting

Sited in the City of Pittsburgh neighborhood of Allentown, the resource is located atop a plateau in a valley between two steep hillsides. Visually, the building is the most prominent, identifiable architectural landmark in the vicinity. Built on a portion of the early nineteenth century estate of Joseph Allen, the resource occupies lots 27-30 of the Boyd & Allen “Boydstown Plan” and lots 777 and 778 of the Maple & McLain Extension of Boydstown (Hopkins 1901). The resource’s parcel is rectangular, measuring approximately 323 feet along Proctor Way and Climax Street and 125 feet along Allen Street. The resource faces liturgical east and is sited approximately 30 feet from Allen Street, creating an open square in an otherwise densely built urban neighborhood.

### Physical Building Description

The resource is of masonry construction. Its foundation, stringcourses, and ornamentation are of limestone. The field of each façade is comprised of red brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern. The resource features deeply raked mortar joints which accentuate the complex brick pattern and enhance the dimensionality of the resource’s exterior. The resource exemplifies a traditional basilica plan. It is cruciform and possesses a narthex, nave, side aisles, recessed clerestory, transept, and rounded apse. The resource measures three bays wide by ten bays deep. Whereas the nave rises only one-story in height, the resource rises to an overall height of six stories when considering its paired towers.

With its primary façade facing west and its apse (and therefore, altar) facing east, the resource faces what is known in Christian tradition as “liturgical east”. With an east facing altar, the resource’s configuration permitted the priest to celebrate mass *ad orientem*, or “to the east”. In Christian tradition, liturgical east is representative of Christ, being synonymous with the rising sun (Carey 1999). As such, many early religious buildings were constructed with the primary façade facing west and the altar facing east. Despite Christian building tradition, a majority of religious buildings in Pittsburgh fail to face liturgical east. Pittsburgh’s varied and often difficult topography made strict compliance difficult, if not impossible. As such, the resource is one of exceedingly few known examples of a church building in Pittsburgh exemplifying a true east-west configuration; it exists as an anomaly.

### West (Primary) Façade: Westwork

The resource’s west (primary) façade (also known as the Westwork), faces due west onto Allen Street. The west (primary) façade is comprised of three major bays: two identical towers flanking the central gable of the nave. The west (primary) façade can be read in five stages, beginning with the foundation and moving upward toward the spires.

#### *Stage One*

The hallmark of Stage One is the central grouping of three ornate portals accessed by a processional stair. A modern accessible ramp has been added at the far left of the stair. Contained within each portal is a double door surmounted by a glass tympanum. Jamb columns and reveals with Byzantine capitals flank each set of doors. An inscribed stone lintel caps each door opening. From right to left, the inscriptions read: “M” (representing Mary, the Virgin Mother), an intertwined “IHS” (Christogram representing Christ), and “J” (representing St. Joseph). The archivolts radiating outward from the tympanum are detailed in rich, vegetative carvings. A single lantern is suspended from the center of the arch. Square pilasters support squat, rounded pilasters between each portal. Centered above each of the three portals is a single peak with a blind trefoil topped by a finial.

On either side of the portals are the tower bases. A projecting stone stringcourse runs the full perimeter of the building starting at the approximate height of the portals’ lower column capitals. Directly above this sill, on either side of the portals are paired, limestone trimmed rounded-arch windows separated by paired, rounded pilasters with Byzantine capitals.

#### *Stage Two*

Stage Two features the building’s iconic rose window, replete with eight petals arranged around a central oculus. The tracery is of white limestone. Each glass petal is separated by stylized pilasters. The central bay is recessed several feet from the flanking towers. Two stacked rounded-arch windows with limestone trim flank the rose window. Stage Two terminates in inverted limestone crenellation. A string of limestone corbels runs the full width of the façade.

### *Stage Three*

Again, flanked by the two towers, the third stage features a central gable, topped by a limestone cross. This gable terminates the western end of the nave. Inverted limestone crenellation is also featured within the gable. A tripartite window trimmed in limestone with rounded Byzantine pilasters is centered in the gable. Three interlaced trefoil openings are centered on each tower. Directly above these openings is a corbelled limestone cornice. Three rounded-arch openings surmount this cornice, each opening separated by a rounded Byzantine pilaster. A string of inverted limestone crenellation is present above these openings.

### *Stage Four*

Stage Four showcases the two towers as they rise above the building. Present in each tower are grand, rounded-arch openings. Contained within these openings is a tympanum with three quatrefoils, the center quatrefoil being the largest of the three. This tympanum sits atop three arched openings separated by two Byzantine columns. Stage Four terminates with a gable, containing a limestone trimmed rounded-arched window. Simply carved waterspouts project from each corner of the tower.

### *Stage Five*

Stage Five is predominantly comprised of the respective spire of each tower. Originally clad in terracotta tile, the spires are now clad in metal. Both spires terminate with original copper crosses.

### *North (Side) Façade*

As one of the most visible elevations, the building's north (side) façade comprises much of the nave, the transept, and the apse. Abutting Proctor Way, this façade is largely unadorned at street level. Two deeply recessed portals grant access to the building from Proctor Way: one into the nave, the other into the base of the north tower. The tower door is framed by a substantial, though plainly carved limestone surround. The nave door is just west of the projecting transept, precisely on axis with Asteroid Way. It is flanked by squared Byzantine pilasters. A massive stone lintel tops the nave door. A limestone-clad base rises from the ground to the water table. Five windows at ground level light the basement. Original plans indicate that there were more basement-level windows, but they appear to have been lost with the installation of the sidewalk. Above the water table, brick is set in Flemish bond with three soldier courses dividing the wall visually. A limestone stringcourse divides the lower, blind brick wall from an upper bank of six rounded-arch stained-glass windows. Each window is recessed into the wall and trimmed in limestone. Above each window is a string of inverted crenellation. Above these windows, the building recedes out of view from ground level, forming the clerestory. The clerestory features three paired rounded-arch windows. Above each pair of windows is, again, inverted crenellation. Three dormer vents punctuate the roof, one centered above each window bay. The steeply pitched roof is clad in terracotta tile.

Toward the eastern end of the northern elevation, the transept projects approximately 15 feet from the nave of the building. Limestone quoins visually demarcate the transept at street level. Centered in the transept gable is another 8-petaled rose window. The window is framed by four limestone diamonds framed in brick. Below the rose window are two symmetrical groupings of three windows separated by rounded Byzantine pilasters. Above the rose window, a string of inverted crenellation and a limestone cornice mark the roofline. Centered in the gable are three rounded-arch openings separated by Byzantine pilasters. A stone crucifix surmounts the gable. At the eastern most end of the northern elevation, the resource transitions into the rounded apse. A single-story ambulatory and what is surmised to be a small chapel project to the east. A tall chimney projects skyward where the apse and the transept meet. The chimney is accented with inverted crenellation.

### *East (Rear) Façade*

The massive, rounded apse is the primary feature of the east (rear) façade. Two large recessed, limestone-trimmed, rounded-arch, stained glass windows light the apse. The single-story ambulatory that began on the northern elevation projects from the base of the apse and is punctuated by individual, limestone-trimmed stained-glass windows. The roof above the apse is semi-conical and terminates at the ridgeline with a copper cross.

### *South (Side) Façade*

The south (side) facade is nearly identical to the north (side) façade with the exception of a projecting, first floor ambulatory. The ambulatory wraps the building to the midpoint of the southern transept projection. The southern elevation also lacks a door at the base of the south tower.

### 3. **History of the St. John Vianney Church** (as extracted from the nomination form)

#### An Early Contextual History of Allentown

In 1827, Joseph Allen, an English-born butcher, purchased 124 acres of land in the vicinity of present-day Allentown. Sited in what was then known as Saint Clair Township, this land had previously been part of John Ormsby's extensive land holdings south of the Monongahela River. Allen purchased this land from Jeremiah Warder. Warder had secured the land from Daniel Beltzhoover, son of Melchor Beltzhoover. Melchor Beltzhoover had purchased a substantial 248.5-acre tract containing present-day Allentown from John Ormsby in 1794.

Allen established a farm on his 124-acre tract. But in 1867, Allen's estate was partially destroyed by fire. Although rebuilt, Allen subsequently relocated to Greentree. Shortly thereafter, the Allen estate was sold by Allen's heirs and in 1870, the Borough of Allentown was incorporated. On April 2, 1872, the Borough was annexed by the City of Pittsburgh.

In the 1870s, contracting firm McLain & Maple purchased both the Allen and Beltzhoover farms. The farms were subsequently subdivided into streets and lots. Most of Allentown's streets and lots had been plotted by 1872. Improvements to transportation in the late nineteenth century proved imperative to Allentown's growth. In 1870, the Castle Shannon Railroad was among the first recognizable means of public transportation in the area. In 1871, the Mount Oliver Incline was completed and opened to the public, permitting direct access to the city's Southside neighborhood. Initially, Allentown was developed by German immigrants, who, wishing to escape the pollution of the city's industrial Southside, moved uphill. Other early immigrant groups were of English, Welsh, and Irish origin.

#### Brief History of Saint George Parish and Saint George Church

Illustrating the predominance of Allentown's early German ethnic composition, Saint George's Parish was formed in 1886. Saint George Parish was established as an outgrowth of Saint Michael Parish on the Southside, one of the oldest German Catholic parishes in Allegheny County. A number of Catholic parishes grew from Saint Michael, including Saint Mary's Church in Chartier's Creek, Saint Joseph's Church in Mount Oliver, Saint Martin's Church in the West End, and Saint Wendelin's Church in Baldwin, among others. On January 18, 1886, Saint George Parish purchased land at Climax Street and Asteroid Way from the estate of Jacob Schaeffner for the sum of \$7,000.00. On September 8, 1886, the cornerstone was officially laid. The Benz Brothers superintended the building's construction. Between 1886 and 1910, the congregation of Saint George Parish grew exponentially. To accommodate this growth, the Parish purchased more land, built a parochial school, established a convent, and constructed a rectory. But by 1910, the 1886 church building had been deemed insufficient. A new, larger church was needed.

In 1910, the architectural firm of Edmund B. Lang & Brother was selected to design the new Saint George Church. The design of the building is attributed to Herman J. Lang. The Duquesne Construction Company was selected as the builder. As German-born immigrant Catholics, the firm of Edmund B. Lang & Brother was able to deliver a design that outwardly expressed the congregation's cultural heritage while simultaneously addressing its programmatic needs. Lang's design for a grand basilica towered over Allentown, not unlike the German cathedrals its congregants had known in Europe. Work commenced on the new building in autumn of 1910. With foundation work complete, the new building's cornerstone was laid on March 12, 1911. The building was completed by mid-1912. It was formally dedicated to service on July 7, 1912.

### 4. **Significance of the St. John Vianney Church** (as extracted from the nomination form)

The *Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects* lists ten criteria, at least one of which must be met for Historic Designation. The nominator is of the opinion that the St. John Vianney Church meets several of the criteria as follows.

#### **Criterion 3: Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship**

The resource is an exceptionally fine example of German Romanesque architecture, an American derivative of the *Rundbogenstil*, or German round-arch style. Specifically, it is one of the largest and latest known examples of the style executed in Pittsburgh by a German-born immigrant architect. Spanning from the late 1820s to the 1860s, the *Rundbogenstil* emerged in German-speaking countries, prior to unification, as a means of establishing a unified German style of building. This German style was eclectic in its origins. It sampled from Byzantine, Romanesque, and Italian Renaissance architecture. Often utilized in the design of sacred spaces, architects shaping the *Rundbogenstil* also looked to early Christian examples for inspiration.

Although the *Rundbogenstil* was largely influenced by academic debate and architectural theory, it was forged in practicality. The *Rundbogenstil* dictated that German architects should build in brick or local stone. It also dictated that German buildings should reflect their respective climates, incorporating steeply pitched roofs to combat inclement weather. Of the style, Architectural Historian Kathleen Curran writes:

*...[T]he Rundbogenstil was perceived as possessing the characteristics necessary for the creation of a pan-German style... The 19<sup>th</sup> century Rundbogenstil represented an improvement or purification of forms gleaned from the historical Rundbogenstil, that is, round-arch architecture from the Early Christian to the Romanesque period... (Curran 1988:365).*

By the late nineteenth century, the *Rundbogenstil* had become synonymous with high-German architectural design. An influx of German immigrant architects is often credited with bringing the style to the United States. The style "...flourished in America between 1865 and 1910. Greek Revival, Italianate, and other styles popular in America before 1865 were not well suited for German ethnic expression. There was nothing particularly German about a church designed to look like a Greek temple, or a church with details borrowed from an Italian villa" (Hampton 1997:54). The resource exemplifies this notion well. But in this instance, German influence did not end with the building. It also extended to the masterful stained-glass windows.

*The windows were made by the firm of George Boos in Munich, and to Leo Thomas a nephew of Mr. Boos is due all credit for their beauty of color and design. Messrs. Boos and Thomas have been comparatively unknown in this country heretofore, but it is safe to say that work like that which we are considering will soon win for them an international reputation (Comes 1920).*

The location of each of these windows, along the nave, ensures that each would be visible to the public, particularly in the evening.

**Criterion 4: Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States**

The resource is among the best-known, extant works of the Pittsburgh architectural firm of Edmund B. Lang & Brother and one of the few known works attributed to German immigrant architect Herman J. Lang (1884-1932).

Herman J. Lang was born March 17, 1884 in the Hesse region of Germany. Very little is known about Lang's early life, education, or training prior to his arrival in the United States. From a stylistic perspective, Lang was an historicist, sampling and experimenting with multiple architectural styles, elements, and forms. The caliber of his work demonstrates that he had architectural training or, at very least, had engaged in an apprenticeship. His buildings exhibit a clear knowledge of architectural theory, a masterful understanding of composition and massing, and an overt consciousness with respect to the building and its context.

In 1901, Lang immigrated to the United States, joining his older brother Edmund B. Lang (1875-1955), who had emigrated from Germany in 1891. Shortly after arriving, Edmund secured work as an architectural draftsman (USCB 1900). Later, Herman joined Edmund in founding the architectural firm of Edmund B. Lang & Brother after becoming a naturalized citizen in 1906. In comparison to some late nineteenth and early twentieth century Pittsburgh-based architects, the firm of Edmund B. Lang & Brother is little recognized today. But a host of early twentieth century engineering, contracting, and architectural journals document the firm's many commissions; from commercial storefronts to well-appointed houses, from fraternal halls to social clubs. But the firm built its reputation in Pittsburgh as a leader in ecclesiastical architecture, specifically Catholic churches and parochial buildings. The firm of Edmund B. Lang & Brother endured until ca.1910. After the dissolution of the firm, Herman and Edmund worked separately until Edmund departed Pittsburgh ca.1918 for Los Angeles, California by way of Winthrope, Washington.

Following the dissolution of the firm, Herman Lang continued his architectural practice, predominantly in Pittsburgh's Southside and Carrick neighborhoods, until his death on June 6, 1932. It can be inferred from his interment in St. George (St. John Vianney) Cemetery, South Side that Herman was either a member of the St. George congregation or was afforded the honor due to his involvement with the design of the church.

**Criterion 7: Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.**

The resource is a physical manifestation of the cultural and ethnic origin of its patrons. Once among the largest ethnic groups to settle in the City of Pittsburgh, more than 18% of present-day Pittsburghers identify as having German ancestry. But unlike other distinctly ethnic Pittsburgh neighborhoods—Bloomfield, Hill District, Squirrel Hill, South Hills—present-day Pittsburgh lacks the clearly defined German districts, neighborhoods, and enclaves that it once had.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, German communities (like Allentown, Deutschtown, Troy Hill, and Bloomfield) were clearly identifiable. Upon arrival in the United States, German Catholic immigrants found themselves separated from mainstream, Protestant society. Language, culture, nativism, and anti-Catholic sentiment all converged to make assimilation difficult. As a result, German immigrants often "...huddled together in strong ethnic communities and neighborhoods where they could preserve their own customs and language". Naturally, "...churches were often the major focal points of these communities..." (Hampton 1997:51).

Prior to the Civil War, many churches, including German Catholic churches, were designed by Protestant architects who failed to understand the specific needs of their patrons. Often, these buildings were less than ideal, but were accepted by German Catholic congregations in an attempt to adapt to their new country and culture (Hampton 1997:52). However, by the late nineteenth century, many immigrant newcomers viewed the loss of their culture and heritage unfavorably. When it came to religious institutions, German immigrants desired German churches built by German architects.

Following the unification of Germany in 1871, an influx of immigrants, including architects, came to the United States to escape unrest and persecution. "German congregations patronized these architects because they felt more comfortable with designers who spoke their language and practiced their religion, but also because German architects had a stronger sense of German style than Irish, English or American-born designers" (Hampton 1997:54). Among the German immigrant architects who settled in Pittsburgh were brothers Edmund B. and Herman J. Lang.

The resource is one of several church buildings (former and current) in Pittsburgh that tell the often untold and forgotten story of the German immigrant condition. Among those still extant are Saints Peter and Paul, Larimer; St. Michael, Southside; St. Stanislaus Kostka, Strip District; and St. Basil, Carrick.

**Criterion 10: Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.**

There are exceedingly few buildings in Pittsburgh that can equal the resource in presence and command of site. From nearly any vantage point within the community, the building, its twin spires, and its blood-red brick are prominently visible.

Sited at the base of a steep hill, the juxtaposition of this grand basilica against the backdrop of small, wooden vernacular houses is almost European, and yet distinctly Pittsburgh. For 104 years the building has anchored the community of Allentown. It embodies the history of its community and holds promise for its future. The building transcends the definition of landmark. The location and distinct physical appearance of 823 Climax Street absolutely represents an established and familiar feature of Pittsburgh's Allentown neighborhood. Without it, Allentown would suffer an immeasurable loss to its sense of place.

## 5. Integrity

The resource was evaluated considering the seven (7) aspects of integrity as defined by the Secretary of the Interior in National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (U.S. Department of the Interior [DOI] 1997). Overall, the resource retains **moderate to moderately-high integrity**.

*Location:* The resource retains **high integrity of location**. It has not been moved from its historic location.

*Design:* The resource retains **high integrity of design**. The historic design of the resource has not been altered.

*Setting:* The resource retains **moderately-high integrity of setting**. Whereas demolition of surrounding built fabric has occurred within the past twenty years, a sufficient number of buildings remain in the resource's immediate vicinity so as to adequately convey the nature of its historic setting.

*Materials and Workmanship:* The resource retains **moderate integrity of materials and workmanship**. The resource has been subjected to alteration since its construction. This includes the replacement of historic terracotta tile on the tower spires with metal cladding and the painting of limestone trim at ground level. Whereas these alterations ultimately serve to degrade overall integrity, the alterations, in comparison to the quality of extant historic materials and workmanship, do not constitute a significant, detrimental impact.

*Feeling:* The resource retains **high integrity of feeling**. The resource's moderate to high integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship contribute to its retention of integrity of feeling. The resource retains the ability to sufficiently convey the associative qualities of its particular place in time.

*Association:* The District retains **low integrity of association**. The resource is vacant and no longer functions in its original, historic capacity as a religious building.

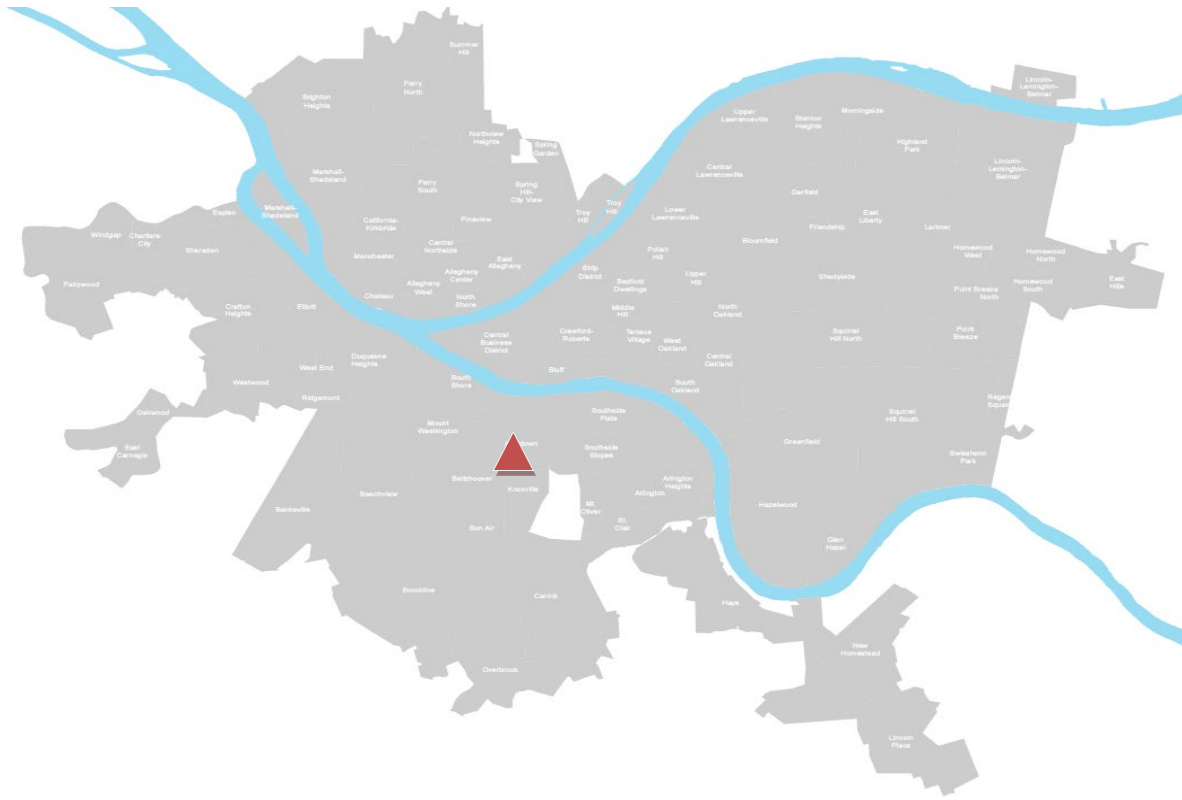
6. Photos







## 7. Maps



## 8. Recommendation of the Historic Review Commission

The Historic Review Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation of the St. John Vianney Church. On August 5, 2020 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate St. John Vianney Church as historic

## 9. Recommendation of the City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation the St. John Vianney Church. On September 15, 2020 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate St. John Vianney Church as historic.

**10. Meeting Minutes**

**HRC MINUTES – JULY 1, 2020 – PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION HEARING**

**St. John Vianney Church**  
**225 Allen Street**

*Historic Nomination*

**Owner:**

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Pgh  
111 Boulevard of the Allies  
Pittsburgh, Pa 15210

Ward: 18th

Lot and Block: 14-F-209

Inspector:

**Nominator:**

Mark Wittman  
105 Haberman Avenue  
Pittsburgh, Pa 15211

Council District:

Nomination Received: 6/9/20

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**National Register Status:    Listed:                    Eligible:**

**Proposed Changes:** Nomination for historic designation.

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Discussion:

1. Ms. Quinn gives some history on the nomination. She states that the department did make the determination that the City would accept the nomination that was submitted, so although the Diocese has indicated that it is not pleased with the City's acceptance of the nomination, the focus of the Commission will still be the process. This month they will be determining the nomination viability, and next month they will make a recommendation to City Council. She makes a short presentation on the property. She states that the nominator found that the property is significant under **Criterion 3**, exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship, **Criterion 4**, work of an architect, engineer, designer, or builder, **Criterion 7**, association with important aspects or events in cultural or social history, and **Criterion 10**, unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh. and that the property does retain integrity.
  2. The Commission discusses the nomination.
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Motion:

1. Ms. Loysen moves to confirm the viability of the historic nomination based on the listed criteria.
  2. Mr. Falcone seconds.
  3. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; Ms. Aguirre, Ms. Loysen, Mr. Falcone, and Mr. Hill are in favor and and Mr. Green abstains. Motion carries.
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**HRC MINUTES – AUGUST 5, 2020 RECOMMENDATION**

**St. John Vianney Church**  
**225 Allen Street**

*Historic Nomination*

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**Owner:**

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Pgh  
111 Boulevard of the Allies  
Pittsburgh, Pa 15210

Ward: 18th

Lot and Block: 14-F-209

Inspector:

**Nominator:**

Mark Wittman  
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Council District:

Nomination Received: 6/9/20

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**National Register Status:**    **Listed:**                    **Eligible:**

**Proposed Changes:** Nomination for historic designation.

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Discussion:

3. Ms. Quinn makes a short presentation on the property. She states that the nominator found that the property is significant under **Criterion 3**, exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship, **Criterion 4**, work of an architect, engineer, designer, or builder, **Criterion 7**, association with important aspects or events in cultural or social history, and **Criterion 10**, unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh. and that the property does retain integrity. She recommends that the Commission give a positive recommendation to City Council.
  4. Ms. Aguirre asks about the ownership of the property.
  5. Ms. Quinn states that the building is owned by the Diocese of Pittsburgh.
  6. Ms. Loysen asks if that will be an issue.
  7. Mr. Dash states that when the application came in, the law department reviewed it and the evidence that was provided within that the building was no longer a religious structure. The law department requested that the City reach out to the Diocese, which they did over a 60 day period with no response. He states that he believes that representatives from the Diocese are in attendance and will speak to this issue as well.
  8. Ms. Aguirre asks for public comment. She states that many emails were received in support of the nomination.
  9. Mr. Christopher Ponticello speaks as counsel for the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh. He states that he has three main points that have previously been made in writing. First, the legal owner of the building is not the Diocese but the
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Bishop as trustee for St. Mary of the Mount Parish. Second, he states that this is clearly a religious structure, as it is a church, and should not be nominated as the owner is opposed to the nomination. He also states that the structure is not closed at this point and could be reopened by the Vatican. Lastly, regarding correspondence about removal of items from the property, he holds that they have an ongoing and continuous right to remove, manage, and safeguard all religious items as defined by the tenets of their faith.

10. Ms. Aguirre states that she feels that the nomination can't be continued at this time without more information.
  11. Mr. Dash states that the nomination can't be withdrawn by anyone except the nominator.
  12. Ms. Quinn states that from the date a nomination is received there are several months that the City is allowed, per the ordinance, to go through the nomination process. She states that it is a tough situation but suggests that the nomination could be tabled for a month to get more clarity from the law department.
  13. Mr. Dash suggests that they can hear the rest of the public testimony before further discussion.
  14. Ms. Aguirre asks for additional public comment.
  15. Mr. Bob Kress speaks as the president of the St. George Church Preservation Society. He states that the nomination did go through the legal department already and was cleared. He states that his organization helped put the nomination together as a historic structure and not a religious structure because of the wording "used for worship." He states that they did send a copy of the Bishop's decree indicating that the structure was closed for worship which was effective as of July 1, 2017. He states that the appeal at the Vatican has gone on for many years and could go on for years longer, but that doesn't change the fact that at the time the application was made it was not a religious structure.
  16. Mr. Mark Wittman speaks as the nominator. He talks about the building's importance in his life and the lives of others and states that it should not be demolished or have its stained glass windows removed, as he states the Diocese is looking to do. He states that the building has been cared for over the years by people of meager means, and they are asking that it be preserved. He restates that the building is closed; the church held a closing ceremony and has not been used as a place of worship since. He asks that the Commission move the nomination forward to City Council.
  17. Mr. Justin Greenawalt speaks on behalf of Preservation Pittsburgh. He states that the building satisfies multiple criteria for designation. He talks about the criteria and states that the purpose of historic preservation is to give a voice to the people who would otherwise be excluded from discussions about the fate of the city's built fabric. He states that historic preservation gives the average person the means to protect the spaces they deem important culturally, socially, and architecturally.
  18. Ms. Kathy Gallagher speaks as the granddaughter of the builder. She states that she did send a letter of support, but reads a quote from her grandfather and states that she agrees with the previous speaker in that it is up to us as the citizens to
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preserve our history.

19. Councilman Bruce Kraus speaks in support of the project. He wants to reiterate the comments from Justin Greenawalt and states that although they have heard a lot of testimony about ownership, he feels that there is a moral argument rather than a legal argument to be made in recognizing the sweat equity put in by generations of German immigrants who built the building by tithing their meager incomes. He states that the building in that way belongs to them and is theirs to preserve for future generations. He feels that the Diocese's argument that they may reopen the building disingenuous as he feels they have no intention of reopening it as a place of worship.
  20. Father Thomas Kunz speaks as the canon lawyer of the Diocese. He disagrees with Councilman Kraus' comments and states that he is working on the appeal and states that the Vatican does overturn the decisions of Bishops and could order the building reopened at any time.
  21. Ms. Chris Schiarelli speaks in support of the nomination. She states that the Diocese has let the structure deteriorate and doesn't believe that they want to maintain it as church. She speaks to this structure's architectural significance and states that it should be maintained as a whole with the stained glass windows intact.
  22. Ms. Aguirre reads for the record the names of the senders of the letters received in support of the nominations. She closes public comment and asks for comments from Commissioners.
  23. Mr. Dash states that he can further clarify the situation from his notes from the law department. He states that the Commissioners can ask questions of the commenters for and against if they wish. He states that the open question is the determination of the use as a religious structure, and the instruction of the law department is to hold the hearing and either move it forward, table it, or dismiss the application for lack of jurisdiction.
  24. Mr. Hill asks for background on the religious structure portion of the ordinance.
  25. Ms. Quinn states that it was an amendment put forward by Councilman Reverend Burgess.
  26. Mr. Dash states that it was put into effect in 2009 by City Council.
  27. Mr. Hill states that he agrees with Councilman Kraus' testimony regarding the reopening of the building. He states that he has a lot of thoughts about it and suggests tabling the nomination for the Commission to have internal discussions.
  28. Ms. Loysen recalls some prior issues with churches such as St. Nicholas and states that it is complicated because they are difficult and expensive to rehab.
  29. Mr. Dash recalls the Albright Church situation and states that the legal department did weigh in on the religious use issue there as well. He states that their advice is if the Commission feels that the Diocese makes a strong case that it is a religious structure they can consider dismissal. He states that the Commission can either make the determination at this hearing or table to get whatever information the
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Commissioners need to feel comfortable.

30. Mr. Snipe states that he is not comfortable moving forward as the building is still tax-exempt as a religious structure.
31. Ms. Loysen states that she isn't comfortable with the Commission being the ones to decide if it is or is not a religious structure.
32. Ms. Aguirre agrees with Mr. Snipe on the tax status.
33. Ms. Quinn states that the decision was above staff level as well and did have to be made by the legal department. She states that they can be contacted by staff for further advice.
34. Ms. Aguirre restates that this was nominated as a structure according to several criteria, and she states that she is concerned about things being removed and damaging the integrity. She states they did feel last month that the structure did meet the criteria, which has not changed. She states that the question of ownership is still unclear.
35. Ms. Quinn suggests tabling for 30 days so staff can contact the law department and possibly set up a small meeting to discuss. She states that the Commission needs to have a sense of comfort in moving forward.

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Motion:

4. Ms. Hill moves to table.
  5. Mr. Snipe seconds.
  6. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; all are in favor and motion carries.
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**PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES –SEPTEMBER 15, 2020**

3. DCP-HN-2020-00090, St. John Vianney Church, Historic Nomination

Ms. Quinn made presentation in accordance with the attached staff report.

She provided history of building construction and use, criteria for nomination and planning staff recommendation.

Chairwoman called for questions and comments from the public.

Mr. Mark Wittman, resident and nominator for this structure stated that church is irreplaceable Building. He asked PC members to protect it from demolition because some construction work already started.

There being no comments from the Commissioners, the Chairwoman called for the motion.

**MOTION:**

That the Planning Commission of the City of Pittsburgh provides a positive recommendation to City Council for the nomination St. John Vianney Church, DCP-HN-2020-00090 for listing as a City-designated historic site.

**MOVED BY:** Ms. Mingo **SECONDED BY:** Ms. Deitrick

**IN FAVOR:** Mondor, Mingo, Deitrick, Blackwell, Dick, O'Neill

**RECUSED:**

**OPPOSED:**

**MOTION CARRIED**

