



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake  
Mayor

## PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman

### STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur  
Director

**August 4, 2011**

**REQUEST:** Baltimore City Landmark Designation/ St. Peter the Apostle Church Complex - 13 S. Poppleton Street, 11 S. Poppleton Street, 848 Hollins Street, 16 S. Poppleton Street

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval

**STAFF:** Anthony Cataldo

**PETITIONER(S):** Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation

**OWNER:** Archdiocese of Baltimore

#### **SITE/GENERAL AREA**

Site Conditions: The subject properties are located at the corner of W. Hollins Street and S. Poppleton Street within the Hollins Market neighborhood. Both properties are zoned R-9.

General Area: This section of West Baltimore has a mixture of uses, institutional, commercial and residential. The University of Maryland Biopark is located just north of the complex along Baltimore Street.

#### **HISTORY**

- On December 8, 2009, the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation recommended Landmark and Special List designations of the St. Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church Complex.

#### **CONFORMITY TO PLANS**

The proposed designation is found to be consistent with the following element of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan: PLAY Goal 1: Enhance the enjoyment, appreciation, and stewardship of Baltimore's historical and cultural resources.

#### **ANALYSIS**

At the September 10, 2009 CHAP hearing, the commission considered Landmark and Special list designations for St. Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church. After hearing the staff presentation and public testimony, which included a request from the Archdiocese of Baltimore (the property owner) to postpone the decision, Commissioners approved a motion "to grant the request of the property owner for a postponement of the vote so the applicant has time to explore landmark designation." On October 16, 2009, The Archdiocese of Baltimore sent CHAP a letter that shared their thoughts with the Commission. This letter supported

landmark designation of the St. Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church and the Rectory (848 Hollins Street) only.

After careful consideration, CHAP staff recommended designation of the entire St. Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church Complex including the school building located at 16 S. Poppleton. These five buildings represent the St. Peter the Apostle church complex and, together, meet Baltimore landmark criteria one, two, and three.

**Designation Criteria:** The quality of significance in Baltimore history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, public interiors, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

**1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history; or**

- St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church Complex is a symbol of the strong Irish community that developed in West Baltimore after the “The Great Hunger” in Ireland. Many of these immigrants relocated to this area to find work with the growing Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

**2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in Baltimore's past; or**

- Robert Cary Long Jr. – Significant architect in the city of Baltimore, son of architect Robert Cary Long Sr.
- Father Edward McColgan – Founding priest of several of Baltimore’s churches and parochial schools.
- Frederick V. Murphy - founder of the Catholic University Architecture department, associate architect for the National Cathedral, and a nationally renowned Catholic architect.

**3. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;**

- St. Peter the Apostle church is a wonderful example of work by Robert Cary Long Jr. This Greek Revival structure is a fine example of the aesthetic Long Jr. introduced to Baltimore. In addition, the school located at 16 S. Poppleton is also the work of renowned architect Frederick V. Murphy, founder of the Catholic University Architecture Department an associate architect for the National Cathedral, and a nationally renowned Catholic architect.

***Summary Significance***

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1843, the corner stone for the St. Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church was laid at the intersection of Poppleton and Hollins Street in West Baltimore. In the 1840’s, West Baltimore was still mostly part of the Mount Clare Estate. The communities, now named Hollins Market, Union Square and Poppleton, would become mostly occupied by the Irish and German immigrants many of whom worked as laborers and craftsmen at the Baltimore and

Ohio Railroad yard. Prior to the construction of St. Peter the Apostle Church all of the brick and mortar Catholic churches were located east of the city's center. Saint Peter the Apostle Church and supporting buildings include a church, rectory, belfry, convent, and two schools. St. Peter's Church became known as "the mother of the west." Dedicated on September 22, 1844, the church became the center for the Irish community in the neighborhood.

### ***Community Background***

The nation's first successful commercial rail line, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, began its operations in West Baltimore area in 1828, creating jobs and a need for a large amount of working-class housing in the area. Surveyors determined the Gwynn Falls to be the best course for the line, connecting Baltimore Town to the Ellicott Mills west of the city. The first Baltimore passenger terminal, several car barns, a round house and shops were constructed at the current B&O Railroad Museum site, all demanding a large amount of labor.

Around the same time Ireland was on the cusp of "The Great Famine," in which approximately one million residents of the country died. A complicated system of absentee land ownership and religious and political strife left the working class citizens with no help. This period of starvation and disease, due to the mass failure of potato and other crops, caused a mass emigration from the country. Between 1845 and 1852 the population of Ireland was reduced by 20% to 25%. In Baltimore alone 67,000 Irish Catholics entered the city between 1840 and 1850.

These laborers constructed their own community while building the Pratt Street B&O complex that still exists today. The houses they built between 1840 and 1850 were mostly modest two-story, federal style structures with one room on each floor and a fire place; brick was the most common building material.

### ***Development of the Church***

St. Peter the Apostle Church started in 1838 as a mission to support the growing Irish population in the then rural western edge of Baltimore Town. A school was opened where mass could also be held in addition to teaching the children of the laborers and rail employees. The school and mission were staffed by the Sulpician Fathers of St. Mary's Seminary, once located on Paca Street in Seton Hill.

In 1842 the parish was officially established by Baltimore's 5<sup>th</sup> Archbishop, Samuel Eccleston. The Archbishop selected a young Irish priest, Father Edward McColgan to pastor the church. He was often noted as an odd man with a lot of energy. He accomplished many great things during his time, including the founding of St. Mary's School for Incurable Boys in 1860, St. Martin's Church in 1865 and St. Edward's Church, all in the western end of the city. Over 56 years as a pastor Father McColgan had great influence over the city of Baltimore.

Father McColgan himself selected Robert Cary Long Jr. to design the St. Peter's structure. Due to Father McColgan's efforts money for the construction of the brick and mortar church on the site was quickly raised, mostly through fairs held at the original Calvert Hall School building on Cathedral and Franklin Streets. The Irish laborers of the B&O Railroad who lived in the surrounding communities donated labor; so much interest was generated by the future

parishioners that some had to be turned away. After several months of construction, supervised by the architect himself, the church was dedicated on September 22, 1844 with a grand ceremony.

After construction of the church was complete, Father McColgan directed his efforts towards education. First was a boy's school opened in 1847 in which the Sisters of Charity (of Mother Seton on Paca Street) ran until 1892. From 1892 to 1968, the Sisters of Mercy ran both schools (girls and boys) on site. The Sisters of Mercy were brought to the United States at the request of Father McColgan in 1843; four were sent to Baltimore, and the rest to Pittsburgh.

The convent was established on site by the Sisters of Mercy in 1855. Founded in Dublin in 1831, the Sisters' mission was to educate girls, protect homeless women, educate them to support themselves, and care for the sick. By 1860 two schools run by the Sisters of Mercy were opened on the site; one parochial for labor class (continued operation well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the Academy of Our Lady of Mercy for daughters of wealthy parishioners (closed in 1891). The Sisters fulfilled their mission in other locations throughout Baltimore City; in 1874 they took charge of old Baltimore City Hospital. They managed the old Lombard Street Infirmary from 1880 till 1889, which eventually became part of the University of Maryland Medical Center still in this location today. The Sisters also founded Mercy Hospital at Baltimore and Calvert streets under the name of City Hospital of Baltimore.

Emily McTavish, the favorite granddaughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, took great interest in the church. Her donations included two houses in 1889 (now gone) on Calender Street outfitted to help the Sisters fulfill their mission, funds for the first girls' school in 1869 and for the second school constructed on the site. Emily McTavish's sister, Marianne, was married to Robert Patterson, a son of a charter member of the B&O Railroad.

### ***Structures***

Several of the structures in the St. Peter the Apostle Church complex were designed by Robert Carey Long Jr., one of Baltimore's prominent early to mid 19<sup>th</sup>-century architects. Robert Carey Long Jr. is the architect of many buildings in Baltimore including St. Alphonsus Church, Franklin Street Presbyterian Church, Lloyd Street Synagogue, and the Greenmount Cemetery Gatehouse. Born ca. 1810, Robert Carey Long Jr. is the son of the Baltimore builder-architect of the same name. Long Jr. studied at St. Mary's College and traveled to Europe in 1826 to study architecture. He returned shortly after arriving in Europe due to a cholera epidemic and began an apprenticeship in New York with Martin Euclid Thompson and Ithiel Town. In 1836 Long Jr. returned to Baltimore to assume his father's practice. In Baltimore, Long Jr. advocated for historical styles, lectured on the latest advancement of architecture, especially European ideas, and began designing buildings in various architectural styles, especially Greek Revival, Egyptian Revival, Gothic Revival and Italianate style. In many ways, Long Jr. set the aesthetic stage for the building of Baltimore during the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century. In 1848 Long Jr. left Baltimore and moved to New York, and died a year later.

Modeled after the Greek Temple, The Theseus, also known as Hephaesteum, St. Peter the Apostle church is Greek Revival in style. The west façade has a double portico of granite with six Doric columns that stand in front of an equal number of brick pilasters. The columns

support an entablature consisting of a plain architrave which is a modestly ornamented frieze of triglyphs, typical of the Doric order, and carried out in molded brick and topped with a projecting stone cornice surmounted by a triangular pediment. Three recessed double doors with stone lintels and projecting stone frames provide entrance to the building. There is a mullioned, leaded transom above each door. The gable roof has the gentle slope characteristic of the ancient Greek style of architecture, combined with the east-west axis required in early Christian churches. The basement story is of hammered granite brought from quarries in Ellicott City, Howard County. A Belfry, which rises two stories above the church building, was built in 1848 and is capped on each of its four sides by a triangular pediment. A cross is situated on the peak of the roof. There are two narrow, arched windows on each side of the tower just below the pediment. Beneath each pair of windows is a bricked-in, arched space. A large bell weighing 2,000 pounds was hung in the belfry in 1848. This bell was removed and recast of the same metal in 1910 by the McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore. The bell is four feet high with a diameter of eight feet.

The Rectory, at 848 Hollins Street, was constructed circa 1849, and is a three-story, three-bay long brick townhouse designed by Robert Cary Long, Jr. The Convent of the Immaculate Conception, built circa 1865 to 1880, stands at 11 South Poppleton Street. It consists of a main building facing west with a wing that was later added to the north. They are of brick painted red. The main section is a five-bay, 3 ½-story brick structure with the entrance in the center bay. This entrance is a double door flanked by brick pilasters and topped with a simple entablature and cross. The windows of the first and second floors have jack arches over them. There is a stringcourse beneath the first floor windows and below the architrave. Beneath the lower one are two cellar windows in the southernmost bays. Above the upper stringcourse are five attic windows incorporated into the frieze. The entablature of the Convent repeats that of the church. This section has a nearly flat gable roof.

The Original Girls' School, standing with its rear façade facing on Booth Street, was erected in 1869 as a free school to accommodate classrooms for girls previously instructed in the church basement. It continued to be used for this purpose until 1917 when the present school building at 10 South Poppleton Street was constructed on the site of the original boys' school. The school is a 2 ½-story, four-bay brick building with a gable roof. Its front façade faces the courtyard, and has two doors in the central bays of the first floor. There are no openings in these bays above the doors. There are 6/6 sash windows in the two outer bays on both the first and second floors. Above these are two attic windows with 3/3 sash. The rear of the building, facing Booth Street, is also 2 ½ stories, but has a basement. There are boarded-up windows in all floors of each of the four bays and two bricked-in cellar windows. (National Register Nomination Form – 1972)

Located across from the Convent is the New Boys' School, built in 1917 and designed by Frederick V. Murphy, founder of the Catholic University of America's Architecture Department and renowned Catholic architect. Born in 1879, Murphy was raised in Chicago by his mother after the death of his father; she had a strong focus on the education of Murphy and his younger sister. As a public school student he learned to draw, eventually taking classes at the Chicago Art Institute. Murphy's first interest in architecture began in 1893 when he visited the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, credited as the beginning of the "City Beautiful

Movement.” In 1899 Murphy moved to Washington D.C. to accept a position as a draftsman in the Supervising Architect’s Office. At night he took architecture classes at what now is George Washington University. In 1905 he was awarded a scholarship to travel to Europe offered by the Washington Architectural Club. While in Europe he participated in the 10-day entrance exam to the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, the French National School of Architecture. He attended for 4 years, frequently participating in ateliers, workshops and studios spread around Paris where students worked with masters to solve architectural problems. In *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* Murphy learned the basics of classical architecture, specifically public buildings, while being encouraged to study new technologies and styles in design. Murphy returned to the Supervising Architect’s Office in 1909. He also began his life-long relationship with Catholic University.

Catholic University was founded in 1889 and by 1911 had developed many strong programs. Sensing a revived interest in the study of architecture the University invited Murphy to establish a Department of Architecture. As the only instructor Murphy taught all of the classes and a very few students. The program did eventually grow, adding more professors to the program and became nationally and internationally recognized. The programs greatest renown was in the 1920’s and 1930. During this time Murphy was also practicing as an architect.

The 1917 Boy’s School at St. Peter’s is one of his first commissions. In his life time Frederick V. Murphy would become a regionally renowned architect. His many works include; the Vatican Legation (now Embassy), the Howard University Law School building, Curly Hall and the Music Hall at Catholic University, the Fourier Library at Notre Dame University, the Girls’ Catholic High School of Baltimore, Shine of the Sacred Heart in Washington, and Shrine of the Sacred Flower in Baltimore.

The Boy’s School at St. Peters is a classically inspired building and stands three full stories tall with a basement level below projecting from the ground with half windows. A beige brick gives the illusion of a stone material. The front façade is 9 bays wide with a central projecting façade three bays wide featuring a colonnade of four terracotta columns. The front entrance is surrounded by a solid brick surround that spans the width below the terra cotta columns. Pilasters separate each bay with 8/8 wood sash windows on the three visible façades. On the front façade only, oxidized metal panels are placed below the third and second story windows. The horizontal proportions of the building are exaggerated by a water table that spans between the first and second story. The side façades of the structure are quite simple, carrying the same water table and window rhythm with square pilasters vertically between each bay of windows on the second and third stories. The rear façade is of standard red brick with no ornamentation; the same windows are used. A small bump-out containing a chimney sits at the basement and first floor level. This structure contains many elements Murphy learned as a student of the Beaux-Arts movement, restraint in design with references to classical elements with a formal composition.

Based on these findings, staff recommends that landmark status be granted.

In advance of a hearing on this matter, staff notified the following groups: Transfiguration Catholic Community, Hollins Roundhouse, Inc, AIA Baltimore, Poppleton Cooperative, Inc., Baltimore Heritage, Poppleton Village Community Development, Gallagher Evelis Jones, Archdiocese of Baltimore, and the University of Maryland Biopark.

**Thomas J. Stosur**  
**Director**