

**From:** [Small Business Forward](#)  
**To:** [MelgarStaff \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Cc:** [christin@booksmith.com](#); [justin.t.dolezal@gmail.com](#); [mercurycOFFEE@gmail.com](#); [Horrell, Nate \(BOS\)](#); [Fieber, Jennifer \(BOS\)](#); [Low, Jen \(BOS\)](#); [Kilgore, Preston \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Land Use — Density Decontrol and Small Business  
**Date:** Monday, March 4, 2024 11:06:25 AM

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Hello Land Use Committee members,

Small Business Forward represents progressive small business owners & workers. We are concerned about proposals for upzoning that are being made without input from the affected communities.

Community members deeply rooted in historically marginalized communities slated for upzoning are concerned about displacement due to escalating market pressures and speculation.

Small businesses don't need just ANY housing, we need affordable housing:

- We need to prioritize increasing the affordable housing that allows small business owners & workers to live in San Francisco.
- We support affordable housing development that allows workers and owners to live in the same city as their small business— we reject that more unbridled profiteering development will achieve more affordability.

Small businesses are also concerned by the upzoning's impact and potential displacement of small businesses. Displacing small businesses will rip the community's fabric apart. Small businesses rooted in their communities are relied upon to provide linguistically, culturally, and economically accessible goods and services— making the community whole.

Please include members of the community and small businesses that are at risk of displacement in this conversation on zoning and development. Before enacting these zoning changes, ensure that the right of return and assistance is in place for small businesses that are displaced or disrupted. Ensure certain businesses such as grocery, hardware stores, and other neighborhood service businesses are provided relocation assistance when forced to move so they aren't displaced from the neighborhood altogether.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Small Business Forward



[smallbusinessforward.org](http://smallbusinessforward.org)

**From:** [William Walker](#)  
**To:** [Calvillo, Angela \(BOS\)](#); [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#); [MelgarStaff \(BOS\)](#); [PeskinStaff \(BOS\)](#); [PrestonStaff \(BOS\)](#); [SafaiStaff \(BOS\)](#); [ChanStaff \(BOS\)](#); [DorseyStaff \(BOS\)](#); [EngardioStaff \(BOS\)](#); [MandelmanStaff \(BOS\)](#); [RonenStaff \(BOS\)](#); [StefaniStaff \(BOS\)](#); [Waltonstaff \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Re: File 231045 Sacred Heart Church | SFBOS Item 15 March 12, 2024  
**Date:** Monday, March 11, 2024 5:50:07 PM  
**Attachments:** [image0.png](#)

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors:

**Re: File 231045 Sacred Heart Church**

To: Hon. Board of Supervisors:

I support the recommendation to the Board of Supervisors from the Historic Preservation Commission, and the Land Use and Transportation Committee *that Sacred Heart Church (554 Fillmore), Rectory (546-548 Fillmore), Convent (660 Oak), School Building (735 Fell) be historically preserved and protected*, and I respectfully urge the full Board of Supervisors to recommend doing the same.

Please ensure that Landmark Status includes protection for:

1. The interior of the church - especially the Achille Disi ceiling fresco. Disi was an artist who worked on the Vatican and for Eugénie de Montijo, the wife of Emperor Napoleon III. Also please protect the stained glass windows, the bells, and other painted decorations.
2. The connector bridge between the church and rectory.

Please also provide stronger protection than the current "preserved or replaced in kind" wording. The current language allows original architectural features to be removed if they are "replaced in kind." "In kind" is terminology derived from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards on preservation. What remains left of the original features should remain there as part of the landmark building.



Sacred Heart Church is one of few remaining institutions standing from before the Redevelopment era that decimated the Black community. From the 1960s until the early 2000s, the church was one of two gospel Black Catholic Churches in San Francisco, the other being St. Paul of the Shipwreck on Jamestown Avenue. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places (#100001665) and located on a promontory in the Western Addition since 1885, it can be seen from many points of the northeastern portion of San Francisco, especially east of Divisadero and north of Cesar Chavez.

My mom, Bertha Canty, was a member of the parish from 1973 until its closure, for four decades. She is now an active member of St. Boniface where the gospel choir from Sacred Heart still sings each Third Sunday of the month currently. I was baptized, received the Holy sacrament of the Eucharist, and was Confirmed at Sacred Heart. I was an alter server at Sacred Heart for nearly a decade and an active member for two decades. According to church parishioner and choir leader Robert Pritchard, only one other church building like it exists, located in Pasadena, and has only been in existence since 1936.

The church always struck me as a unique building. There are very few buildings made of brick in San Francisco. The gold color of the brick is also very unique. I moved away from San Francisco for a short period, around the time of the parish closure. Upon returning to San Francisco I was invited to an event at a Church on 8 Wheels. Upon arriving at my then and still now defunct parish, of a church community that I haven't been an active member of since the Sacred Heart closure, I cried, and was unable to attend the function that day.

The parish is very significant to the San Francisco Black community, many of whom have been forced out. I, too, have been facing an eviction for 11 years by a bank landlord. My days here continue to be numbered. I would hope if for any reason I could no longer live in San Francisco, that the spirit and edifice of Sacred Heart can continue. That former parishioners, many of whom are in their eighties and dozens who are no longer on this Earth, can use the space on occasion to hold events, in the manner that the former St. Joseph's Parish basilica

was preserved South of Market (near 10th and Howard streets).

The church led one of the first Head Start programs in the country. It existed as a place of refuge during the tumultuous end of the 20th Century that saw drastic changes to the Fillmore neighborhood, the assassinations of a Mayor and Supervisors, the AIDS crisis, and the waves of gentrification in the neighborhood that began at the behest of Justin Herman and Joe Alioto. According to author Rebecca Solnit, the Black Panthers held meetings there, a history I never knew as a parishioner. Many parishioners came back after moving away every Sunday, until their parish was no more. Please consider my support letter for the preservation of Sacred Heart Church and its ancillary buildings in your deliberations during the March 5 Board hearing. Thank you.

Kind regards,

William Walker

Tel. 415.260.2069

[transitequity.substack.com](http://transitequity.substack.com)

[wiyum@wiyum.org](mailto:wiyum@wiyum.org)



Committee February 26, 2024 Meeting Agenda 2. 231045 [Planning Code - Landmark Designation - Sacred Heart Parish Complex] Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate the Sacred Heart Parish Complex, located at 546-548 Fillmore Street, 554 Fillmore Street, 735 Fell Street, and 660 Oak Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 0828, Lot Nos. 12, 21, 22, and 22A, as a Landmark consistent with the standards set forth in Article 10 of the

Planning Code; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302, and findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1. (Historic Preservation Commission) 10/10/23; RECEIVED FROM DEPARTMENT. 10/24/23; ASSIGNED UNDER 30 DAY RULE to the Land Use and Transportation Committee. 2/2/24; NOTICED. 2/12/24; CONTINUED.

**From:** [Mark De Vitis](#)  
**To:** [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#); [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Annabel McClellan](#); [Simon Yip](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 6, 2024 4:23:25 PM  
**Attachments:** [De\\_Vitis\\_Disi\\_II.pdf](#)  
[A Disi Sacred Heart Letter.pdf](#)  
[Welsh Letter Yonan 030424.pdf](#)

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Supervisors Melgar, Peskin and Preston (and Pilar, John, Annabel and Simon),

I hope this letter finds you all well.

Over the past two weeks, I have been pleased to learn that so much progress has been made on the Sacred Heart Landmark decision. My hope is that a satisfactory solution for all invested parties can be found. To that end, I must apologise, as I understand there was some suggestion at yesterday's meeting that such a position may have already been reached. I regret to say, that from my perspective and for those I represent, that is not the case.

While my aim is to make a constructive contribution to this process, my training and work as an art historian requires that I offer a carefully reasoned, professionally informed position on the issues that sit before us all. As such, I must reiterate that the Disi ceiling currently in place at Sacred Heart is indisputably of historical significance – and substantially so – and, without question, it should be covered in the resolutions for the ordinance that will govern the future of the site. The ceiling is, at the very least, the equal of the church's windows in terms of cultural significance. My research, already submitted to you all, establishes this position beyond any doubt.

To further underscore how important the ceiling is, I have asked colleagues in the United States, Europe and Australia to consider writing to you, to offer their perceptions. I was waiting to receive all these submissions so I might send them to you in a single document, but I now see that this decision may have caused a misapprehension regarding how the current draft of the ordinance was received by the scholarly community.

I have attached the first two letters to this email. One is a collectively-signed letter from the French and Italian Departments at UC Davis. The other is from Professor Michael Yonan, the Alan Templeton Endowed Chair in the History of European Art at UC Davis.

Both letters affirm the importance of preserving the Disi ceiling. I expect to send you more letters like these in the coming days and weeks.

I am at your disposal at any time.

Yours in good faith,

Best,

Mark De Vitis

**DR MARK DE VITIS** | Lecturer  
Art History | Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

**THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**  
Room 306, R.C. Mills Bld A26 | The University of Sydney | NSW | 2006  
T +61 2 9036 5096 | E [mark.devitis@sydney.edu.au](mailto:mark.devitis@sydney.edu.au)

Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Supervisor Myrna Melgar  
Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
Supervisor Dean Preston

**Re: Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)**

Dear Supervisors Melgar, Peskin and Preston (and Pilar, John, Annabel and Simon),

I hope this letter finds you all well.

Over the past two weeks, I have been pleased to learn that so much progress has been made on the Sacred Heart Landmark decision. My hope is that a satisfactory solution for all invested parties can be found. To that end, I must apologise, as I understand there was some suggestion at yesterday's meeting that such a position may have already been reached. I regret to say, that from my perspective and for those I represent, that is not the case.

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I have attached the first two letters to this email. One is a collectively-signed letter from the French and Italian Departments at UC Davis. The other is from Professor Michael Yonan, the Alan Templeton Endowed Chair in the History of European Art at UC Davis. Both letters affirm the importance of preserving the Disi ceiling. I expect to send you more letters like these in the coming weeks.

I am at your disposal at any time.

Yours in good faith,

Dr. Mark De Vitis

Art History | Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
The University of Sydney | NSW | 2006  
E mark.devitis@sydney.edu.au

March 1, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

As faculty in the Department of French and Italian at the University of California, Davis, we would like to strongly advocate for the protection of the ceiling decorations in the nave of Thomas Welch's Sacred Heart in the building's heritage ordinance. The artist, Achille Disi, a naturalized US citizen who was born in Rome and emigrated in 1902 is an important part of the city's century and a half of Italian-American history. The ceiling in San Francisco's Sacred Heart is one of a very few of Disi's important civic and church commissions still intact to this day. Even as Sacred Heart is renovated and adapted to add to San Francisco's housing stock, Disi's ceiling, if preserved, will visually celebrate San Francisco's Italian-American heritage.

Sincerely,

Grace Delmolino, Assistant Professor of Italian

Melissa Demos, Lecturer in Italian

Claire Goldstein, Director, Humanities Program, Associate Professor of French

Jay Grossi, Senior Lecturer in Italian

Noah Guynn, Professor of French, Associate Dean for Faculty

Margarhita Heyer-Caput, Professor of Italian, Emerita

André Naffis-Saheli, Assistant Professor of Italian and English

Eric Louis Russel, Professor of French and Italian

Michael Subialka, Associate Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature



DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ART HISTORY

PHONE (530) 752-0105

FAX (530) 752-0795

ONE SHIELDS AVENUE

DAVIS, CALIFORNIA 95616-8585

4 March 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

It has come to my attention that there are plans to renovate the Sacred Heart Church in San Francisco, an important building designed by Thomas Welsh and containing a vitally significant ceiling fresco by the Italian American artist Achille Disi. As an historian of European art and its influence, I wish to fully advocate strongly for the protection of this building and the fresco within it. It is an important example of neo-Baroque architecture, a prominent landmark in the city, and a tangible link to California's immigration history. Unfortunately California has a poor record of protecting early twentieth-century architecture and this is Welsh's only remaining church in the state, as well as one of the few paintings by Disi to survive in its original architectural context. It is a vital document of California's Italian heritage and preserving it will make this history remain tangible for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Yonan".

Michael Yonan, Ph.D.

Professor of Art History

Alan Templeton Endowed Chair in the History of European Art, 1600–1830

**From:** [Courtney Damkroger](#)  
**To:** [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#); [Woody LaBounty](#); [mark ryser](#)  
**Subject:** 2/26/24 Land Use& Transportation Committee/Dear Members of the Land Use and Transportation Committee/Sacred Heart Church Complex, File 231045  
**Date:** Monday, February 26, 2024 11:44:15 AM  
**Attachments:** [2024 2 26 Sacred Heart Land Use.docx](#)

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Dear Members of the Land Use and Transportation Committee,

Please see the attached letter for today's meeting.

Courtney Damkroger

February 25, 2024

Supervisor Myrna Melgar  
Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
Supervisor Dean Preston  
San Francisco City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Sacred Heart Church Complex, File 231045

Dear Members of the Land Use and Transportation Committee:

I write in support of the designation of the Sacred Heart Church Complex as a City Landmark under Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code. As a member of the Historic Preservation Fund Committee (HPFC), I am pleased to see this nomination finally making its way to the Board of Supervisors. Recognizing the significance of the complex as well as the need to better protect this important San Francisco resource, the HPFC funded the landmark designation report.

It is worth noting that the Sacred Heart Complex is significant not only for its role in the development of the Western Addition as well as the Catholic religious community in San Francisco during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also for its association with Father Eugene Boyle, and important civil rights activist, and for its architecture and association with the master architect Thomas J. Welsh.

In reviewing the designation report, I urge the Committee to include important recent revisions that are consistent with the original report funded by the HPFC as well as standard preservation practice. Those revisions include:

1. “Conservation” of character defining features rather than allowing “replication” of such features.
2. Inclusion of the “bridge” between the church and former rectory as a character defining feature of the complex as well as other refinements proposed to the exterior character defining features by the HPFC.
3. The inclusion of interior features in the documented list of character defining features. I understand that a discussion is occurring now regarding a few important interior features.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,  
Courtney Damkroger  
Member, Historic Preservation Fund Committee

cc: Woody LaBounty, SF Heritage

**From:** [mrmpr@earthlink.net](mailto:mrmpr@earthlink.net)  
**To:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Monday Feb 26: Land Use & Trans Comm: sacred heart art 10 designation. File 231045  
**Date:** Monday, February 26, 2024 9:58:57 AM  
**Attachments:** [Sacred Heart Article 10.pdf](#)

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Hello John:

I wanted to forward this letter re Item #2 on today's agenda to ensure it is included in the info available to the Committee in their deliberations.

Thank you.

Mark Ryser

**From:** Robert Cherny [mailto:robt.cherny@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, February 26, 2024 9:50 AM  
**To:** Peskin, Aaron (BOS) <aaron.peskin@sfgov.org>; Supervisor Dean Preston <dean.preston@sfgov.org>; melgarstaff@sfgov.org  
**Cc:** Kilgore, Preston (BOS) <preston.kilgore@sfgov.org>; Smeallie, Kyle (BOS) <kyle.smeallie@sfgov.org>; Horrell, Nate (BOS) <nate.horrell@sfgov.org>; mark ryser <mrmpr@earthlink.net>; Woody LaBounty <woody@woodylabounty.com>  
**Subject:** Monday Feb 26: Land Use & Trans Comm: sacred heart art 10 designation. File 231045

Please consider the attached letter when reviewing the Article 10 designation for Sacred Heart Church.

Thank you.

Robert W. Cherny  
Professor *emeritus* of History  
San Francisco State University



**ROBERT W. CHERNY**  
**PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF HISTORY**  
San Francisco State University  
e-mail: robt.cherny@gmail.com

February 26, 2024

Hon. Myrna Melgar  
Hon. Aaron Peskin  
Hon. Dean Preston  
San Francisco Board of Supervisors  
San Francisco City Hall, Rm. 244  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

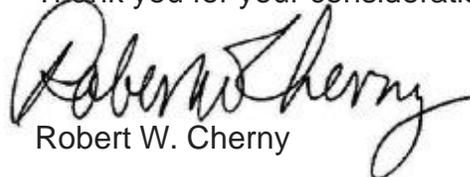
Re: Article 10 Landmark Nomination of former sacred heart church.  
(Fell & Fillmore Sts.)  
Board of Sups File 231045. Land Use and Trans Committee: February 26, 2024.

Dear Supervisors Melgar, Peskin, and Preston:

I am writing in full support of the attached letter from Mark Ryser. He and I were members of the Historic Preservation Fund Committee at the time that committee funded the study of the Sacred Heart complex on which the subsequent landmarking nomination have been based. I served as peer reviewer for that project.

My own qualifications are that I fully meet the Secretary of the Interior's qualifications for historian; I have published extensively in academic journals and with academic presses on the history of our city; I served for five years on the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, the predecessor of the Historic Preservation Commission; I have been author or co-author of several successful National Register or HABS nominations; and I have been peer reviewer for several Historic Context Statement. .

Thank you for your consideration,



Robert W. Cherny

Attachment: letter from Mark Ryser

Sunday February 25, 2024.

Hon Myrna Melgar  
Hon Aaron Peskin  
Hon Dean Preston

Re: Article 10 Landmark Nomination of former sacred heart church. (Fell & Fillmore Sts.)  
Board of Sups File 231045. Land Use and Trans Committee: February 26, 2024.

Dear Supervisors:

In 2015 and 2016, the Historic Preservation Fund Committee (HPFC)\*, contracted, managed and paid for the preparation, by a qualified professional and to the standards and format required by the Planning Department, of a researched historical study and architectural assessment of the former sacred heart parish complex. The complex consists of 4 structures. No longer belonging to the Catholic Church, which disposed of the property after its forced closure of the parish in 2004, it has been in private ownership since about 2005.

The study and assessment, in fact, exceeded, substantially, the standards set by the CCSF for a Case Report and resulted in a 96 page document. I have copies in the form prepared for publication available for any of you who would like one.

The Study was undertaken with the support of the Planning Department. The resulting document was provided to assist them and serve as the "Case Report" required to initiate formal consideration of whether facts demonstrated sacred heart met the criteria established under Article 10 and whether designation was reasonable. The then Preservation Commission initiated designation in 2016 but, for reasons not entirely understood by us, did not proceed to complete the process.

In September of last year, the Department again set the matter for hearing. At the time of that hearing staff introduced previously unannounced and surprising changes to the earlier draft ordinance language. At the September 2023 hearing the Commission adopted the staff recommendations in their entirety, unfortunately with little apparent curiosity about concerns expressed and errors found in the documents, despite being called out in substantial public testimony and contemporaneous written communication with staff.

This has resulted in the need to seek modification at this Board of the draft ordinance language approved by the Preservation Commission.

In a letter dated December 11 of last year, I first wrote you identifying several aspects of serious concern. Since that time, in an effort to create, on balance, a better designating ordinance, I, San Francisco Heritage and others have worked with the property owners, the Planning Department and with those of your offices which responded to our communications.

This letter seeks to provide an update since the time of my December letter. It is limited to my knowledge as of this date, Sunday February 25, 2024. I have not yet seen all language that I understand has been or is in preparation for your consideration at the February 26 hearing.

You are pummeled by a multitude of issues, many, I acknowledge, of greater import to you than landmark issues. For that reason, ***please allow me to begin by reminding us all that the action under consideration is whether the property in question qualifies under the standards of Article 10 of the Planning Code as an architecturally and/or historically landmark.***

Those standards involve the identification of “character defining features” which is a key part of the basis for designation. If adopted, they then tend to define the scope of future deliberations when, and if, a future project proposes changes to an already designated building.

An action to designate a landmark is not approval or disapproval of any plan, proposal or application for physical work. This *Designation* does not approve or disapprove any project for the property. That is done at a separate proceeding by the Preservation Commission, in which they consider specific plans, to issue a “Certificate of Appropriateness”.

At that time previously named “character defining features” are not guaranteed protection from diminishment or loss, but they are guaranteed, under the law, deliberation by the Preservation Commission whether their treatment under a proposed project design is reasonable, taking into account the specifics of the situation.

The former Sacred Heart church is currently the object of a project, by its owners, to reuse the structure. As a masonry building, and one which incorporates an extraordinary feature, it is presumed that required seismic retrofit of the building constitutes a challenge. Under the law setting forth designation procedure, determination of which of an existing building’s features are highly important to it (“character defining”) is to be entirely independent of approval or disapproval of how those features might be affected by any particular subsequent construction scheme.

In violation of this standard guiding procedure, but a violation I accept in this instance, the draft designating ordinance for sacred heart both before and after these requested refinements being proposed jointly by the owners, SF Heritage and the HPFC, reflect major concessions (in part by the omission of most interior features) afforded to the owners in anticipation of their contemplated project.

Advocates of landmark designation want to work together with owners to ensure a meaningful conservation of this very significant church structure.

**1. LANGUAGE of the HP COMMISSION-ADOPTED VERSION which APPEARED to ALLOW REPLICATION RATHER THAN CONSERVATION of “CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES” at WILL and WITHOUT CONDITIONS:**

Language shared with me last week by Supervisor Preston’s staff improves the deeply troubling earlier version. At this time, if adopted, it adequately addresses concerns, raised earlier.

**2. OMISSION of the BRIDGE BETWEEN the (former) CHURCH and the (former) RECTORY and other EXTERIOR “CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES” ISSUES.**

Based upon newspaper accounts and permit history, contrary to erroneous and incomplete information cited previously, this feature was constructed in 1907 when the rectory was rebuilt and its new third floor added following a major fire in late 1906. It is an integral “character defining feature” older, by far, than 2 of the 4 buildings on the site which are called out for retention in their entirety. The amendment language the HPFC, SF Heritage and others have proposed, and which is supported by its owner\*\* places this feature back among those named, so that its future treatment will be considered by the Preservation Commission. Language, agreed upon by owners and advocates, has been provided your offices and, if adopted, will resolve this key concern.

Other aspects of the draft ordinance language describing the exterior “character defining features” of the church building as adopted by the HPC (September 2023) was inconsistent and provided insufficient guidance for future owners and future Preservation Commissioners. Working with the

owners, we have agreed upon modest refinements to address this issue and have met with Planning staff. We understand that language is under consideration by you in the context of this hearing. If adopted, these amendments address earlier concerns.

### **3. “LOST OPPORTUNITY” re NAMING of INTERIOR “CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES”:**

The language adopted by the HPC in September identified no “character defining features” of the interior of the church, a reversal of their earlier position. Staff, in their 2023 presentation to the Commission, stated there were none. As it was my understanding from the owners that their plan for the structure would seek to retain certain interior features, my argument in the earlier communication to you suggested it was a “lost opportunity” not to name these features, keeping in mind that the language created in the designation ordinance will govern deliberations by future Commissions of future projects by future owners.

In response, owners have now identified a small number of aspects which they do not object be named in the designating ordinance. These have been included in the requested amendments provided to your staffs. These amendments do not include many features of concern to the larger community, and in particular the painted ceiling, which is the subject of a very recently completed essay based on original research into the origins and artist who created the work. This document has been provided to owners, planning staff and your offices.

Whether any further consideration of interior features beyond those identified in the amendments agreed to, to date, is left to your determination.

Thank you.

Mark Ryser, Chair  
Historic Preservation Fund Committee

\* The Historic Preservation Fund Committee was created as a result of the settlement of the citizens’ lawsuit brought in response to the illegal demolition of the Emporium Building by Forrest City Development. The settlement established a fund, overseen by a 7 member committee (including one seat each filled by the B of Sups, a Mayoral and a HPC appointment). Its work is now largely completed but it funded community and planning department historic preservation initiatives in each of your and the other Sups districts.

\*\* The “bridge” lies entirely within the air space of the property lines of the church structure. Its owners have repeatedly stated their intention to retain it and have no objection to its inclusion as a named “character defining feature”. The rectory, is under separate ownership. The “bridge” connects and thus attaches to the north wall of the rectory (a wall built at the property line). The owner of the rectory has now stated his objection to naming the bridge as a character defining feature despite the fact it belongs to and is within the property of his adjoining neighbor. (Ironically, the rectory cornice (called out for retention by Planning staff) is said to extend over that property line into that of the church structure.)

**From:** [William Walker](#)  
**To:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: File 231045 Sacred Heart Church | Item 2 Feb 26 Land Use Committee  
**Date:** Sunday, February 25, 2024 11:48:14 PM  
**Attachments:** [image0.png](#)

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Hi John,

Hope all is well. Can you add this to the file for Land Use Transportation Committee on 2/26?

Thank you,

William Walker  
Researcher, Blogger  
California Transportation Equity Committee Chair  
143 Louisburg St  
San Francisco, CA 94112  
Tel. 415.260.2069  
[transitequity.substack.com](http://transitequity.substack.com)  
[wiyum@wiyum.org](mailto:wiyum@wiyum.org) | [wlwalker@uci.edu](mailto:wlwalker@uci.edu) | [wlwalker@g.ucla.edu](mailto:wlwalker@g.ucla.edu)

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** **William Walker** <[wiyum@wiyum.org](mailto:wiyum@wiyum.org)>  
**Date:** Sun, Feb 25, 2024 at 4:40 PM  
**Subject:** File 231045 Sacred Heart Church | Item 2 Feb 26 Land Use Committee  
**To:** <[melgarstaff@sfgov.org](mailto:melgarstaff@sfgov.org)>, <[peskinstaff@sfgov.org](mailto:peskinstaff@sfgov.org)>, <[prestonstaff@sfgov.org](mailto:prestonstaff@sfgov.org)>  
**CC:** <[ropritchard@gmail.com](mailto:ropritchard@gmail.com)>, <[paw4kids@aol.com](mailto:paw4kids@aol.com)>, Bertha Canty  
<[bertha.canty@gmail.com](mailto:bertha.canty@gmail.com)>

February 25, 2024

**Re: File 231045 Sacred Heart Church | Item 2 Feb 26 Land Use Committee**

To: Hon. Chair Preston and Supervisors Melgar and Peskin:

I support the recommendation to the Board of Supervisors from the Historic Preservation Commission, *that Sacred Heart Church (554 Fillmore), Rectory (546-548 Fillmore), Convent (660 Oak), School Building (735 Fell) be historically preserved and protected*, and I respectfully urge members of Land Use and Transportation Committee to recommend doing the same.



Sacred Heart Church is one of few remaining institutions from before the Redevelopment era that decimated the Black community. From the 1960s until the early 2000s, the church was one of two gospel Black Catholic Churches in San Francisco, the other being St. Paul of the Shipwreck on Jamestown Avenue. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places (#100001665) and located on a promontory in the Western Addition since 1885, it can be seen from many points of the northeastern portion of San Francisco, especially east of Divisadero and north of Cesar Chavez.

My mom was a member of the parish from the late 1970s or early 1980s until its closure, nearly three decades. She is now an active member of St. Boniface where the gospel choir from Sacred Heart still sings today. I was an alter server at the church nearly a decade and an active member for two decades. According to church parishioner and choir leader Robert Pritchard, only one other church building like it exists, located in Pasadena, and has only been

in existence since 1936.

The church always struck me as a unique building. There are very few buildings made of brick in San Francisco. The gold color of the brick is also very unique. I moved away from San Francisco for a short period, around the time of the parish closure. Upon returning to San Francisco I was invited to an event at a Church on 8 Wheels. Upon arriving at my then and still now defunct parish, of a church community that I haven't been an active member of since the Sacred Heart closure, I cried, and was unable to attend the function that day.

The parish is very significant to the San Francisco Black community, many of whom have been forced out. I, too, have been facing an eviction for 11 years by a bank landlord. My days here continue to be numbered. I would hope if for any reason I could no longer live in San Francisco, that the spirit and edifice of Sacred Heart can continue. That former parishioners, many of whom are in their eighties and dozens who are no longer on this Earth, can use the space on occasion to hold events, in the manner that the former St. Joseph's Parish basilica was preserved South of Market (near 10th and Howard streets).

The church led one of the first Head Start programs in the country. It existed as a place of refuge during the tumultuous end of the 20th Century that saw drastic changes to the Fillmore neighborhood, the assassinations of a Mayor and Supervisors, the AIDS crisis, and the waves of gentrification in the neighborhood that began at the behest of Justin Herman and Joe Alioto. According to author Rebecca Solnit, the Black Panthers held meetings there, a history I never knew as a parishioner. Many parishioners came back after moving away every Sunday, until their parish was no more. Please consider my support letter for the preservation of Sacred Heart Church and its ancillary buildings in your deliberations during committee on February 26. Thank you.

Kind regards,

William Walker  
Tel. 415.260.2069  
[transitequity.substack.com](http://transitequity.substack.com)  
[wiyum@wiyum.org](mailto:wiyum@wiyum.org)



Committee February 26, 2024 Meeting Agenda 2. 231045 [Planning Code - Landmark Designation - Sacred Heart Parish Complex] Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate the Sacred Heart Parish Complex, located at 546-548 Fillmore Street, 554 Fillmore Street, 735 Fell Street, and 660 Oak Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 0828, Lot Nos. 12,

21, 22, and 22A, as a Landmark consistent with the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302, and findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1. (Historic Preservation Commission) 10/10/23; RECEIVED FROM DEPARTMENT. 10/24/23; ASSIGNED UNDER 30 DAY RULE to the Land Use and Transportation Committee. 2/2/24; NOTICED. 2/12/24; CONTINUED.

**From:** [mrmpr@earthlink.net](mailto:mrmpr@earthlink.net)  
**To:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Monday Feb 26: Land Use & Trans Comm: sacred heart art 10 designation. File 231045  
**Date:** Sunday, February 25, 2024 8:23:58 PM  
**Attachments:** [Hist Pres- Sacred Heart- Art 10 Desig- Ltr to B of S Land Use 2-25-2024.docx](#)

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**From:** mrmpr@earthlink.net [mailto:mrmpr@earthlink.net]  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 25, 2024 8:26 PM  
**To:** 'Aaron Peskin' <aaron.peskin@earthlink.net>; 'Kilgore, Preston (BOS)' <preston.kilgore@sfgov.org>; 'Smeallie, Kyle (BOS)' <kyle.smeallie@sfgov.org>; Horrell, Nate (BOS) <nate.horrell@sfgov.org>; 'MelgarStaff@sfgov.org' <MelgarStaff@sfgov.org>  
**Cc:** 'Woody LaBounty' <wlabounty@sfheritage.org>  
**Subject:** Monday Feb 26: Land Use & Trans Comm: sacred heart art 10 designation. File 231045

Sunday February 25, 2024.

Hon Myrna Melgar  
Hon Aaron Peskin  
Hon Dean Preston

Re: Article 10 Landmark Nomination of former sacred heart church. (Fell & Fillmore Sts.)  
Board of Sups File 231045. Land Use and Trans Committee: February 26, 2024.

Dear Supervisors:

In 2015 and 2016, the Historic Preservation Fund Committee ( HPFC)\*, contracted, managed and paid for the preparation, by a qualified professional and to the standards and format required by the Planning Department, of a researched historical study and architectural assessment of the former sacred heart parish complex. The complex consists of 4 structures. No longer belonging to the Catholic Church, which disposed of the property after its

forced closure of the parish in 2004, it has been in private ownership since about 2005.

The study and assessment, in fact, exceeded, substantially, the standards set by the CCSF for a Case Report and resulted in a 96 page document. I have copies in the form prepared for publication available for any of you who would like one.

The Study was undertaken with the support of the Planning Department. The resulting document was provided to assist them and serve as the “Case Report” required to initiate formal consideration of whether facts demonstrated sacred heart met the criteria established under Article 10 and whether designation was reasonable. The then Preservation Commission initiated designation in 2016 but, for reasons not entirely understood by us, did not proceed to complete the process.

In September of last year, the Department again set the matter for hearing. At the time of that hearing staff introduced previously unannounced and surprising changes to the earlier draft ordinance language. At the September 2023 hearing the Commission adopted the staff recommendations in their entirety, unfortunately with little apparent curiosity about concerns expressed and errors found in the documents, despite being called out in substantial public testimony and contemporaneous written communication with staff.

This has resulted in the need to seek modification at this Board of the draft ordinance language approved by the Preservation Commission.

In a letter dated December 11 of last year, I first wrote you identifying several aspects of serious concern. Since that time, in an effort to create, on balance, a better designating ordinance, I, San Francisco Heritage and others have worked with the property owners, the Planning Department and with those of your offices which responded to our communications.

This letter seeks to provide an update since the time of my December letter. It is limited to my knowledge as of this date, Sunday February 25, 2014. I have

not yet seen all language that I understand has been or is in preparation for your consideration at the February 26 hearing.

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You are pummeled by a multitude of issues, many, I acknowledge, of greater import to you than landmark issues. For that reason, **please allow me to begin by reminding us all that the action under consideration is whether the property in question qualifies under the standards of Article 10 of the Planning Code as an architecturally and/or historically landmark. Those standards involve the identification of “character defining features” which is a key part of the basis for designation. If adopted, they then tend to define the scope of future deliberations when, and if, a future project proposes changes to an already designated building.**

**An action to designate a landmark is not approval or disapproval of any plan, proposal or application for physical work. This *Designation* does not approve or disapprove any project for the property. That is done at a separate proceeding by the Preservation Commission, in which they consider specific plans, to issue a “Certificate of Appropriateness”. At that time previously named “character defining features” are not guaranteed protection from diminishment or loss, but they are guaranteed, under the law, deliberation by the Preservation Commission whether their treatment under a proposed project design is reasonable, taking into account the specifics of the situation.**

**The former sacred heart church is currently the object of a project, by its owners, to reuse the structure. As a masonry building, and one which incorporates an extraordinary feature, it is presumed that required seismic retrofit of the building constitutes a challenge. Under the law setting forth designation procedure, determination of which of an existing building’s features are highly important to it (“character defining”) is to be entirely independent of approval or disapproval of how those features might be affected by any particular subsequent construction scheme.**

In violation of this standard guiding procedure, but a violation I accept in this instance, the draft designating ordinance for sacred heart both before and after these requested refinements being proposed jointly by the owners, SF Heritage and the HPFC, reflect major concessions (in part by the omission of most interior features) afforded to the owners in anticipation of their contemplated project.

Advocates of landmark designation want to work together with owners to ensure a meaningful conservation of this very significant church structure.

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**1. LANGUAGE of the HP COMMISSION-ADOPTED VERSION which APPEARED to ALLOW REPLICATION RATHER THAN CONSERVATION of “CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES” at WILL and WITHOUT CONDITIONS:**

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Language shared with me last week by Supervisor Preston’s staff improves the deeply troubling earlier version. At this time, if adopted, it adequately addresses concerns, raised earlier.

**2. OMISSION of the BRIDGE BETWEEN the (former) CHURCH and the (former) RECTORY and other EXTERIOR “CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES” ISSUES.**

Based upon newspaper accounts and permit history, contrary to erroneous and incomplete information cited previously, this feature was constructed in 1907 when the rectory was rebuilt and its new third floor added following a major fire in late 1906. It is an integral “character defining feature” older, by far, than 2 of the 4 buildings on the site which are called out for retention in their entirety. The amendment language the HPFC, SF Heritage and others have proposed, and which is supported by its owner\*\* places this feature back among those named, so that its future treatment will be considered by the Preservation Commission. Language, agreed upon by owners and advocates, has been

provided your offices and, if adopted, will resolve this key concern.

Other aspects of the draft ordinance language describing the exterior “character defining features” of the church building as adopted by the HPC (September 2023) was inconsistent and provided insufficient guidance for future owners and future Preservation Commissioners. Working with the owners, we have agreed upon modest refinements to address this issue and have met with Planning staff. We understand that language is under consideration by you in the context of this hearing. If adopted, these amendments address earlier concerns.

### **3. “LOST OPPORTUNITY” re NAMING of INTERIOR “CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES”:**

The language adopted by the HPC in September identified no “character defining features” of the interior of the church, a reversal of their earlier position. Staff, in their 2023 presentation to the Commission, stated there were none. As it was my understanding from the owners that their plan for the structure would seek to retain certain interior features, my argument in the earlier communication to you suggested it was a “lost opportunity” not to name these features, keeping in mind that the language created in the designation ordinance will govern deliberations by future Commissions of future projects by future owners.

In response, owners have now identified a small number of aspects which they do not object be named in the designating ordinance. These have been included in the requested amendments provided to your staffs. These amendments do not include many features of concern to the larger community, and in particular the painted ceiling, which is the subject of a very recently completed essay based on original research into the origins and artist who created the work. This document has been provided to owners, planning staff and your offices. Whether any further consideration of interior features beyond those identified in the

amendments agreed to, to date, is left to your determination.

Thank you.

Mark Ryser, Chair  
Historic Preservation Fund Committee

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\* The Historic Preservation Fund Committee was created as a result of the settlement of the citizens' lawsuit brought in response to the illegal demolition of the Emporium Building by Forrest City Development. The settlement established a fund, overseen by a 7 member committee (including one seat each filled by the B of Sups, a Mayoral and a HPC appointment). Its work is now largely completed but it funded community and planning department historic preservation initiatives in each of your and the other Sups districts.

\*\* The "bridge" lies entirely within the air space of the property lines of the church structure. Its owners have repeatedly stated their intention to retain it and have no objection to its inclusion as a named "character defining feature". The rectory, is under separate ownership. The "bridge" connects and thus attaches to the north wall of the rectory (a wall built at the property line). The owner of the rectory has now stated his objection to naming the bridge as a character defining feature despite the fact it belongs to and is within the property of his adjoining neighbor. (Ironically, the rectory cornice (called out for retention by Planning staff) is said to extend over that property line into that of the church structure.)

**From:** [Siu-Mei Wong](#)  
**To:** [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)  
**Date:** Sunday, February 25, 2024 4:36:21 PM

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Supervisor Aaron Peskin, Supervisor Dean Preston, Supervisor Myrna Melgar, Mr. John Carroll:

Please register my support for landmarking of Sacred Heart Church.

The new State Housing Legislation, which took effect January 1, 2024, aims to streamlining approvals, offering density incentives, removing local review. Along with our Local government's ongoing top priorities to create more housing structures, this trend is making historic buildings more vulnerable than ever. The unique characteristics of our City are in danger and disappearing fast.

It should be undisputable that Sacred Heart Church is a historical landmark. The timing to obtain the landmark status seems to be ever more pressing now. Please help to protect and preserve Sacred Heart Church.

Sincerely,

Siu-Mei Wong  
2363 Van Ness Ave Apt 303  
San Francisco CA 94109

**From:** [PATRICIA WELSH](#)  
**To:** [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#); [ropritchard@gmail.com](mailto:ropritchard@gmail.com)  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Church  
**Date:** Saturday, February 24, 2024 1:51:22 PM

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Sent from my iPad

My name is Patricia Welsh. I am the great granddaughter of Thomas Welsh. I wanted to be with you today, but age and poor health prevent me from being there. ( I must tell you that you are voting on my eighty-first birthday. I'm hoping for a wonderful present).

My great grandfather, Thomas J. Welsh, is one of San Francisco's pioneer architects. He is credited with over seven hundred buildings in California including civic buildings, schools, churches, religious buildings, mansions, individual homes and two family dwellings. He was also known as the "Architect for the people." Because of the passage of time and the destruction from the 1906 Fire and Earthquake, a large majority of his buildings were destroyed or damaged beyond repair.

Sacred Heart stands as the only church that remains out of twelve

The design is one of few in the United States. In fact, it is the only one of its kind west of the Mississippi. It is shameful what the San Francisco Archdiocese allowed to happen to its interior but I the architecture still stands as a tribute to the work of my great grandfather and all the dedicated people who are trying to save it.

When you vote today, please remember that making it a landmark, you are protecting this unique structure. You will be saving a place in San Francisco's history for an architect who dedicated his life to bringing beauty to our city, one building at a time.

**From:** [Jan Robinson](#)  
**To:** [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)  
**Date:** Thursday, February 22, 2024 8:34:35 PM

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Dear President Peskin, and Supervisors Preston and Melgar,

As a longtime San Francisco resident, and a member of the Committee to Save St. Brigid Church, I'm writing to express my full support for the landmarking of Sacred Heart Church. This building has been part of the City's skyline since 1897 - its elegant, golden form gracing the hill overlooking Hayes Valley, for longer than any of our lifetimes.

Having one of the most diverse congregations in San Francisco, Sacred Heart had its own Gospel Choir for many years. That choir recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, despite losing the beloved home that it had there.

Not only did the State Office of Historic Preservation find Sacred Heart Church eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010, but the building contains a painted ceiling by acclaimed Italian artist Achille Disi. Having done work for the Vatican and for the wife of Emperor Napoleon III, this work is of great historical significance.

The building's architect was Thomas Welsh, who designed other churches for the Archdiocese. Sadly the others were lost to earthquake and fires, but Sacred Heart is the sole remaining example of Welsh's remarkable work. Maximum safeguards are needed to protect the existing architecture, in both the interior, and the exterior. City approval should be required before any attempt by the property owner and developer to "replace in kind" any features currently existing on the premises.

San Francisco has lost too many of its historic buildings, such as the Fox Theatre and City of Paris. Those buildings are irreplaceable, and it is tragic that future generations will never see or experience them. We at St. Brigid Church were successful with our landmarking efforts, and are so grateful to have had the City's help in making it San Francisco City Landmark #252.

Sacred Heart Church is also an artistic and historical treasure, and is fully deserving of landmark protection. Please honor the people who donated to and built it, plus those who fought so hard to save it. Its outline, up on the hill, proclaims "permanence", for all of the generations following ours.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jan Robinson  
1940 Washington St. Apt. C  
San Francisco, CA 94109

**From:** [Arthur Levy](#)  
**To:** [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#); [Board of Supervisors \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Landmark Designation - Sacred Heart Parish Complex, File No. 231045 (2015-005890DES)  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 21, 2024 9:05:15 AM

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Dear President Peskin and Supervisors Preston and Melgar:

Sacred Heart is historically rich, architecturally distinguished, and a longstanding and prominent feature of San Francisco's history and skyline. I urge the Board of Supervisors to grant landmark status for this irreplaceable cultural and historical resource.

My personal connection with Sacred Heart is that my father grew up at 825 Oak Street. He was a second generation native San Franciscan, and I am a third generation native. Sacred Heart and the kids who went to school and worship there were part of his neighborhood, over 100 years ago. He spoke fondly of his friends from Sacred Heart and the time he spent there. I remember that whenever I see Sacred Heart's spire from far away or am nearby.

The Landmark Resolution should include the following protections:

1. The interior of the Church should be recognized as character defining and protected as part of Landmark status. Sacred Heart's interior is integral to the character of the Church and the original Welsh architectural design. This includes the frescoes painted by distinguished Italian artist Achille Disi. Loss of the Disi frescoes would result cause irremediable damage to the character of Sacred Heart Church.
2. <!--[endif]-->The connector bridge between the rectory and the church should also be recognized as a character defining feature of the structure and protected as part of Landmark status.
3. <!--[endif]-->The Board should not permit property owner and developer free rein to "replace in kind" any features without first obtaining City approval.

Thank you for your efforts to keep San Francisco's fabulous past alive for future generations.

Sincerely,

Arthur D. Levy

Arthur D. Levy  
Pacific Building  
610 - 16th Street  
Suite 420  
Oakland, California 94612  
Telephone: (415) 702-4551  
Facsimile: (415) 814-4080

**From:** [Tamala Motta](#)  
**To:** [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)  
**Date:** Thursday, February 15, 2024 11:09:26 AM

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To all,

My name is Tamala Motta and I'm a native San Franciscan. I'm writing you this letter today to ask that you please protect the historical architecture, inside and out, of the Sacred Heart Church, and please do not replace it with "like in kind" architecture! The work of Achilles G. Disi's existing ceiling work is so important to San Francisco and its residents. Please protect this landmark!!!

Thank you for your time and urgent attention to this matter,  
Tamala

Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)

**From:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**To:** [Michael Powell](#)  
**Cc:** [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Low, Jen \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Smeallie, Kyle \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Angulo, Sunny \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES) - BOS File No. 231045 - LUT February 26, 2024  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 14, 2024 9:44:00 AM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)

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Thank you for your comment letter.

I am forwarding your comments to the members of the LUT committee, and I will include your comments in the file for this ordinance matter.

I invite you to review the entire matter on our [Legislative Research Center](#) by following the link below:

-

[Board of Supervisors File No. 231045](#)

**John Carroll**

**Assistant Clerk**

Board of Supervisors  
San Francisco City Hall, Room 244  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415)554-4445



Click [here](#) to complete a Board of Supervisors Customer Service Satisfaction form.

The [Legislative Research Center](#) provides 24-hour access to Board of Supervisors legislation and archived matters since August 1998.

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**From:** Michael Powell <fillmo@sbcglobal.net>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 13, 2024 2:23 PM  
**To:** Carroll, John (BOS) <john.carroll@sfgov.org>  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Mr Carroll,

I am writing you today with my concerns about the Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation. I am deeply concerned that the interior of this historic church would not be adequately protected.

The impressive Romanesque arches of the former Sacred Heart church (standing at the corner of Fillmore and Fell,) have been in place for more than 125 years. Its honey-coloured and intricate brickwork, soaring campanile and solemn façade make Sacred Heart an impressive sight. One of the most famous visual landmarks with the San Francisco skyline behind it. Of the many churches that the famous architect Thomas Welsh built, only this one remains. **It is imperative that it remains as a living archive of an irreplaceable part of San Francisco's architectural history.**

Sacred Heart is more than a building, however. It is a site tied to impactful activism and resistance, it still houses a painted ceiling by Professore Achille Disi – who worked on the Vatican and for Eugénie de Montijo, the wife of Emperor Napoleon III – is loaded with windows, bells and painted decoration of great historical significance! Sadly, it has been the victim of unconscionable vandalism. Its altars, furnishings and anything of worth that could be removed were ripped from it – the legality of which is the subject of a city investigation that has never been resolved.

I am concerned that there will be nothing that would protect any of the interior spaces of the church, including fixed artworks. Not the connector bridge between the church and the rectory. The windows will be removed and preserved. Worryingly, anything that is actually covered in the draft ordinance – basically, the exterior of the church – will be, according to the draft, preserved or “replaced in-kind” [my emphasis]. The ‘or’ is significant here. How does one replace finely crafted nineteenth-century artistry “in-kind”? Who will determine what is retained and what is replaced “in-kind” and how will this process happen? Will the possibility of replacing an aspect of the church “in-kind” include consultation of heritage specialists?

The resolutions in the draft ordinance are weak. Much of what has been proposed that is positive is not in an official document but instead only given as an informal agreement between the developer and a city planner. Yet, the agreement that will govern Sacred Heart is not bound to the current development. It is permanent. What happens if the church is sold to someone else? What happens if the developer's plan changes as the project progresses? What value is a handshake agreement then?

San Francisco has lost too many of its iconic landmarks to short sighted, well financed interests who have no interest in the city or its heritage. Too many famous places reduced to a mere plaque for a quick dollar. Too many interiors gutted for generic designs by cheap outside developers just trying to make a buck. This has got to stop. The community demands that you take the time to research this ( ). And if you actually represent the people of San Francisco and not just the interest of outside moneyed developers, and if you actually care about serving the needs of the city and its rich colorful history, I urge you to do the right thing and take the time to craft something that honors that commitment.

Thank you,

Michael Powell  
532 Ashbury St. SF CA 94117

**From:** [joseph welsh](#)  
**To:** [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)  
**Date:** Friday, February 9, 2024 11:53:34 AM

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

February 8th, 2024

Dear Supervisors & Land Use and Transportation committee members:

Thank you in advance for your support for an ongoing issue now totaling 2 decades. If you weren't aware Sacred Heart Church is the last surviving ecclesiastical masterpiece by my Great Grandfather Thomas J. Welsh. He was the preeminent architect for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, even hired to design the original St. Mary's Cathedral that was sadly destroyed by fire in 1962. Holy Cross in Santa Cruz is another of his churches

<https://holycrosssantacruz.com/>

So, we now hope you will support The Sacred Heart community and its legacy, not just with the Landmarking itself, but by ensuring the current draft ordinance from the Planning department is revised to ensure protections of existing elements of the exterior and interior of our cherished church, which still contains rare and important works of art! We consider the current resolutions in the draft ordinance inadequate for a building so rich in history and culture, and ask that they be reconsidered to add further protections.

Sacred Heart is more than a building. It houses a painted ceiling by Achilles G. Disi – who worked on the Vatican itself! He also worked for Eugénie de Montijo, the wife of Emperor Napoleon III! A lot of the art has been removed from the church, but a lot also remains. To date, the Sanctuary still has the transept and Choir loft commemoration stained glass windows, Mrs. Mary Hartigan's bronze bell, and the intact painted decorations of great historical significance. Sadly, in 2010, it was the victim of unconscionable vandalism for the unauthorized removal of its three Atillio Moretti Carrara marble altars, the pair of Fritz Mayer Rose Windows, the Hook and Hastings Pipe Organ, the set of three etched Art Deco entrance doors with matching transoms, and all Church furnishings, lighting and anything of worth that could be removed were stripped from it by the Church. The legality of these actions were considered, voted on, and determined to be serious enough that they were the subject of a SF city investigation, but never were acted on by the then SF District Attorney.

We implore you to take a clear stance to support District 5, to safeguard our Achilles G. Disi ceiling and artworks. Thomas J. Welsh brilliantly designed Sacred Heart so that his architectural stylings flowed from the exterior into the interior finishes, so flawlessly, and into the lofty Sanctuary as well. Don't allow San Francisco to lose one more important treasure.

The following churches – Our Lady of Guadalupe its interior has been respected, Saint Brigid, thankfully in its entirety, Saint Joseph's basic interior has been respected, and integrated into a very thoughtful reuse.

Please ensure the current loose wording of the ordinance is revised, and that the vague and weak resolutions are amended to represent the importance of Sacred Heart.

Sincerely,  
Joseph Welsh, Jr.  
San Francisco, CA

Friday, 9 February 2024

**Supervisor Myrna Melgar**  
**Supervisor Aaron Peskin**  
**Supervisor Dean Preston**

San Francisco City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place San Francisco, CA 94102

**Re: Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)**

Dear Supervisors Melgar, Peskin and Preston,

I understand that you will soon consider the proposition to grant Landmark status to the Sacred Heart church at Fillmore and Fell. Considering this, I thought it would be helpful to receive a submission on the artist who completed the painted decorations on the ceiling of the church, which are still in place.

The recommendation provided by the Planning department (September 20, 2023) does not include provisions to safeguard any aspect of the interior of the church, including the painted ceiling. By the Planning department's own admission, this determination was made through consultation with the current owner of the site,<sup>1</sup> whose plans, as far as I am aware, consist of building 7 apartments in the transept and roof space of the church, retaining the nave as a community space. While I strongly support the recommendation offered by the Planning department to grant the church Landmark status,<sup>2</sup> the historical significance of the interior of the church should be considered beyond what the developer may be able to offer. I hope what I provide here goes some way in establishing the significance of interior features of Sacred Heart.

Drawing upon my training as an art historian whose current project, in part, focuses on San Francisco in the late-nineteenth century, I have spent the last several months completing archival research in San Francisco on aspects of the interior of the church. As far as I am aware, no secondary scholarship exists on the interior features of Sacred Heart, and nothing of substance has been written on the artist who completed the work on its ceiling. I have uncovered important information pertinent to the Landmark determination for Sacred Heart, which I happily share here.

The artist in question is the Italian born Professore **Achille G. Disi**, who became an American citizen in 1917. The documents that I have uncovered reveal the unquestionable significance of his work. In America, Disi was **referred to by contemporary critics as a "genius",<sup>3</sup> and "the strongest champion of his genre living in the United States."**<sup>4</sup>

I ask that you revise and expand the resolutions that will govern the Sacred Heart church to include, and secure the future of, Disi's work.

Thank you for taking the time to read through my submission.

Sincerely,



Dr. Mark De Vitis, PhD  
Lecturer in Art History  
The University of Sydney

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<sup>1</sup> "After consulting with the property owner of the Church, the Department recommends including only exterior character defining features in the landmark designation ..." *Landmark Designation Recommendation Executive Summary*, San Francisco Planning, September 20, 2023, page 1.

<sup>2</sup> "The Department recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors landmark designation of Sacred Heart Parish Complex ..." *Landmark Designation Recommendation Executive Summary*, San Francisco Planning, September 20 2023, page 2; and *Landmark RESOLUTION Recommendation Draft RESOLUTION NO. XXXX*, San Francisco Planning, September 20, 2023

<sup>3</sup> 'Ritorno in Citta Del Prof. A. G. Disi.' *L'Italia*, Volume 31, Number 58, 27 February 1917, page 4

<sup>4</sup> 'Cronaca Della Colonia Italian', *L'Italia*, Volume 25, Number 96, 22 April 1911, page 3

## Artist's Background: Disi's Illustrious Early Career in Europe

Achille Giacomo Disi was born in Rome in 1869.<sup>5</sup> His father was the sculptor, Antonio Disi.<sup>6</sup> As a student, Achille Disi was affiliated with the most illustrious artists and art institutions of the great city of Rome, and later Milan. He first studied at the prestigious Academy of Fine Arts of Rome (Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma), which was founded in the sixteenth century. Here, leading artists who taught Disi recognised his considerable talent, and he was engaged to work alongside his professors on projects of the highest level of significance – a clear sign of his talent.

Importantly, Disi studied with Luigi Bazzani (1836-1927). Bazzani, known as Il Bazzanetto, taught at the Accademia and at the Scuola delle arti Ornamentali,<sup>7</sup> and was celebrated for the several hundred studies he made of the ruins at Pompei, which have been identified as a “precious” resource.<sup>8</sup> Bazzani was also chosen to teach drawing and watercolour to the King of Italy, Vittore Emmanuele.<sup>9</sup> Recent exhibitions of Bazzani's work have taken place at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.<sup>10</sup> Bazzani won major commissions in the city of Rome, such as his work at San Lorenzo fuori le mura (one of the seven Pilgrim Churches of Rome and one of the five papal basilicas).<sup>11</sup>

Recognising Disi's talent, Bazzani began to include Disi in his projects. Disi spent three years working on a project at the **Basilica dei Santi XII Apostoli** with Bazzani, and another three years working with him on a project at **the Vatican**,<sup>12</sup> the eminence of which speaks for itself.

As a star pupil being given major opportunities, Disi was then able to establish a career of his own in Italy, France and across Europe. He was commissioned by the Silezni brothers to work on the **Hotel D'Angleterre, also known as the Palazzo Silenzi**.<sup>13</sup> The hotel attracted a glittering set of guests, whose comings and goings were commented on in the popular press. For example, in December 1905, Prince Leopold of Battenberg (Queen Victoria's grandson), Sir Augustus Hemming (the former Governor of Jamaica), the marquis and marquise Fioravanti, and the comte Manzoni, all stayed at the hotel.<sup>14</sup> It was a major commission for a young artist to receive, and likely resulted in further commissions from important patrons.

From Rome, Disi travelled to Paris and the French Riviera where he was commissioned to decorate the **Moorish Hall of the grand casino in Monte Carlo**,<sup>15</sup> and to work on the **villa of Eugénie de**

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<sup>5</sup> 'Population Schedule', *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*. State of California, County of San Francisco, Ward 33A, Block 128, Sheet 15B. April 15, 1930.

<sup>6</sup> 'Bank of Italy's New Building Marks Boost for S.F.', *San Francisco Call*, Volume 109, Number 148, 28 June 1921, page 5.

<sup>7</sup> Angelo Libranti, 'Centenario della scuola delle arti ornamentali', *Strenna Dei Romanisti: Natale di Roma*. Roma: Editrice Roma Amor, 1980, pages 350-352

<sup>8</sup> Luciana Jacobelli, 'DAVVERO! La Pompei di fine '800 nella pittura di Luigi Bazzani', *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani*, Vol. 24 (2013), pp. 151-152, page 152.

<sup>9</sup> Luigi Bazzani, 'Italian Painter' *New York Times*. New York, N.Y.. 04 Feb 1927: page 19.

<sup>10</sup> Fikret K. Yegül, 'Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples.' *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (March 2010), pp. 136-139

<sup>11</sup> Tani, A. D. *Le chiese di Roma: guida storico-artistica: chiese stazionali*, Torino: Edizioni D'Arte E. Celanza, 1922, pages 137-138

<sup>12</sup> 'Bank of Italy's New Building Marks Boost for S.F.', *San Francisco Call*, Volume 109, Number 148, 28 June 1921, page 5.

<sup>13</sup> 'Adding to the Fame of the Mission Inn'. *Riverside Daily Press*, Volume XXIX, Number 207, 31 August 1914, page 3.

<sup>14</sup> *The Sphinx*, Vol. 13, No. 182, 1905, page 15.

<sup>15</sup> 'Adding to Fame of Mission Inn: Work of Artist Disi Unique in America', *Riverside Daily Press*, Volume XXIX, Number 207, 31 August 1914, page 3.

**Montijo, wife of Napoleon III and Empress of France.**<sup>16</sup> Having established himself as a young artist of renown, he then sought to extend the reach of his reputation.

## Disi's Prolific Work in Chicago

Disi and his wife arrived in the United States at some point in 1902, when he was in his early 30s.<sup>17</sup> They settled in Chicago and remained there for six years. In that time, Disi was awarded numerous important commissions – the most prestigious that were on offer in the city – and completed an astounding amount of work. He was given two of the main rooms (the “Dutch” and the “German” rooms) of the Auditorium Annex (now known as the Congress Plaza Hotel) to decorate.<sup>18</sup> Further commissions included the Illinois Theatre and the Grand Pacific Hotel,<sup>19</sup> the Iroquois, Marlow and Majestic theatres, and St. Mary’s Church.<sup>20</sup>

## Significant projects in California

Disi arrived in California in 1908 and quickly attracted admiration for his work. His first commission was for the glamorous Bismarck Café, which was in the newly completed Pacific Building on Market Street. According to its proprietors, it was the largest and finest café in San Francisco.<sup>21</sup> Disi’s work at the Bismarck was “praised by all” and the café management included his name in their advertisements, demonstrating the esteem in which he was held and that he was a selling point.<sup>22</sup> Disi went on to work on many major commissions across the city of San Francisco, including the Bank of Italy building [550 Montgomery, also called Clay-Montgomery Building, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1978, and was added to the National Register of Historic Places on June 2, 1978], the Paulist’s Church on California Street, and, of course, the ceiling of Sacred Heart.

Beyond San Francisco, Disi worked regularly in the state capitol, Sacramento. There, he was given commissions for the Capital National Bank, the Sacramento Valley Bank, the Land Hotel, the Country Club and the Godard Theatre.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, in Riverside, he worked on the remarkable Riverside Inn, also known as the Mission Inn, which is now registered as a heritage site by various agencies [City of Riverside Cultural Heritage Landmark (no. 1, February 5, 1969), California Historical Landmark (no. 761, October 21, 1961), and National Register of Historic Places (ref. # 71000173 added May 14, 1971)]. The inn was ostensibly a luxury hotel but also functioned as an important cultural centre. In 1925, the Los Angeles Times referred to it as being as much a museum as a hotel.<sup>24</sup> Disi’s work at the

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Bank of Italy’s New Building Marks Boost for S.F.’, *San Francisco Call*, Volume 109, Number 148, 28 June 1921, page 5

<sup>17</sup> ‘Alla Mostra Decorativa...’, *L’Italia* (Italian Daily News), Volume 23, Number 254, 30 October 1909, page 1

<sup>18</sup> ‘Adding to the Fame of the Mission Inn’. *Riverside Daily Press*, Volume XXIX, Number 207, 31 August 1914, page 3

<sup>19</sup> ‘Adding to the Fame of the Mission Inn’. *Riverside Daily Press*, Volume XXIX, Number 207, 31 August 1914, page 3

<sup>20</sup> ‘Bank of Italy’s New Building Marks Boost for S.F.’, *San Francisco Call*, Volume 109, Number 148, 28 June 1921, page 5

<sup>21</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 106, Number 141, 19 October 1909, page 9

<sup>22</sup> ‘Un Artista Italiano Ohe Si Fa Onore’, *L’Italia*, Volume 22, Number 102, 1 May 1908, page 4

<sup>23</sup> ‘Ritorno in Citta Del Prof. A. G. Disi.’ *L’Italia*, Volume 31, Number 58, 27 February 1917, page 4. Godard’s J Street Theatre was opened in 1915 and over the course of its life was renamed several times. On March 8, 1930, it was renamed Sutter Theatre. On November 30, 1933, it became El Rey Theatre. In 1941, it was damaged by fire, only to be restored and reopened as the Rio Theatre (March 21, 1942). By the 1960s it was dedicated to showings of Mexican movies. On August 17, 1966, it was again renamed, and became the Cinema Theatre. In 1969, its main business was the screening of adult films, also with live burlesque performances. The theatre finally closed in the late 1960s and was subsequently demolished.

<sup>24</sup> L.J. VandenBergh, “Riverside Inn is Treasure House of Ancient Art,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1925, part III, page 1

inn was considered highly innovative for its technique, basically a form of fresco (painting into wet plaster rather than onto dry plaster), and his impressive work was met with awe and appreciation.<sup>25</sup> In the press his work at the inn was touted as being unique: “There is possibly only one other example of this character of decoration in America.”<sup>26</sup>

## **Disi at Sacred Heart: A Spatially Driven Spiritual Journey**

Disi completed the painting of the Sacred Heart ceiling in 1920. His work there comprises two Old Testament narratives – Cain and Abel, and Abraham and Isaac – and an impressive central scene of radiating rays of light containing two angels bearing the Paschal Lamb surrounded by a celestial aureole. In addition to this, Disi painted individual depictions of the Twelve Apostles and four angels in roundels with decorative flourishes, all of which sit beneath the flat of the ceiling in the deep cove that forms its outer perimeter.

Disi’s work at Sacred Heart demonstrates a unique vision, and the ceiling is treated boldly. Rather than crowding the ceiling with narrative or decorative elements, Disi thoughtfully deploys considerable tracts of painted colour, creating negative space between his three scenes. Though the forms he paints show his fluency with the styles of the Second Empire, he deviates from what is typical, to connect his work to the specifics of Sacred Heart itself, and particularly, the physical space of the church and the experience of moving through it. His work at Sacred Heart is highly specific to the site and unique within his oeuvre.

While his palette speaks to his European roots and desirable colour schemes of the late nineteenth century,<sup>27</sup> Disi does not replicate the spatial workings of the Second Empire or even the villas of Pompei. Remarkably, he leaves considerable painted expanses between his narrative scenes to encourage the viewer to make theological connections between them, generating a kind of experiential spiritualism of profound contemplation. In doing so, he intends to draw the two Old Testament scenes into dialogue with the depiction of the Paschal Lamb, which, though it occurs chronologically later than the other two, is the generating force of the scheme, and sits at its centre.

Both Old Testament scenes contain large areas of open sky, taking up about half of each composition. With each, these areas of sky are placed inwards, towards the depiction of the Paschal Lamb. This is particularly prominent with the Cain and Abel scene, for an arc is created at the horizon, which maps onto the curve of radiating light that extends from the depiction of the Paschal Lamb. This echoing of form, and the orientation of painted light towards painted light across the three scenes, combined with the large, non-figurative areas between narrative scenes, establishes a field where the viewer is asked to carefully consider the relationships between the works. Uncrowded and marked as requiring deep contemplation – afforded through the expansive framing – Disi shows the Paschal scene as a life-giving force, contrasting Cain’s self-interested violence with Christ’s self-sacrificing crucifixion. The fact that the instruments of Christ’s passion are depicted beneath Cain – framing the depiction of the brothers between allegories of Christ’s sacrifice – is rich in meaning. With the Abraham scene, Abraham’s devotion is meant to be an illustrative model, but Isaac is saved precisely because he is not Christ.

These theological meanings are played out further through the physical act of viewing the works in space. Entering the church, the Cain and Abel is closest to the entry point, with the Abraham and Isaac placed before the Sanctuary. This imparts a theological point. Beginning with Cain and Abel

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<sup>25</sup> Emily Ann McEwen, *Southern California’s Unique Museum-Hotel: Consuming the Past and Preserving Fantasy at Riverside’s Mission Inn, 1903-2010*. PhD in History, University of California, Riverside, 2014, page 125

<sup>26</sup> ‘Adding to Fame of Mission Inn Work of Artist Disi Unique in America’, *Riverside Daily Press*, Volume XXIX, Number 207, 31 August 1914, page 3

<sup>27</sup> ‘Sacred Heart Church is Beautifully Frescoed’, *The Monitor*, 2 October 1920, pages 2-3

who are representative of the fall of humanity, the viewer moves down the nave to then encounter the Paschal scene which offers redemption through Christ's sacrifice. Finally, the beholder encounters the Abraham scene, which foretells the subsequent and unique sacrifice of Christ, hence its placement closest to the altar, as it leads to the sacrament. This is reinforced through Abraham's gesture, which sweeps outwards, away from his body to encompass the space before the Sanctuary. Abraham leads the beholder from his painted narrative into physical reality, as he directs the viewer to the altar where mass is celebrated – and where a retelling of the Paschal image is performed in actuality. Ultimately, the deep non-figurative borders of the ceiling function as a painted pathway, leading between the three scenes, and as the beholder progresses through the space of the church, down the nave towards the Sanctuary, they are afforded a poignant journey through the theology of Christian belief that culminates with the eucharist.

Disi's work is very sensitively formulated as more than just a series of individual scenes. It is a careful management of space, both painted and physical, which are folded into one another as he envisages the meeting of the earthy and heavenly. This is furthered through his portrayals of the twelve apostles and angels, who look directly into the space of the church and thus break the barrier between painted and physical realities. His purpose is to engage the beholder, here through an exchange of gazes.

Disi's work at Sacred Heart is then an entire painted world, meant for the beholder to enter into – they are encouraged to look, think, understand and feel as if they are within, rather than outside of his vision. He immerses the viewer in complex ideas, which are clearly revealed and articulated through their movement and progress through the church.

## The Cultural Significance of the Artist

Disi and his wife became citizens of the United States on October 17, 1913, and both were deeply invested in their community. Beyond his work as an artist, Disi was an important figure in the Italian community in San Francisco and was instrumental in realising many civic and charitable projects. Achille sat on the executive committee of the group which was responsible for the fundraising and installation of the statue of Giuseppe Verdi in Golden Gate Park – a grand and important event that was widely reported on – and his wife sat on the board of the Choral Society.<sup>28</sup> Personally, he made notable contributions to the Verdi statue fund,<sup>29</sup> and donated his time and talent to produce a print that was available through subscription to raise money for those in need during the First World War.<sup>30</sup> He sat on the Board of Directors of the Italian School,<sup>31</sup> and various exhibitions of his work attracted warm praise. His exhibition at the Circle A Club in Portland “was commented upon as being one of the finest displays of its kind ever seen in Portland.”<sup>32</sup>

## Concluding Thoughts

As the draft ordinance currently stands, Disi's work in Sacred Heart – paintings of major cultural importance – are offered no guarantee for their safeguarding into the future. If the nature of the current project should change, or the church be sold at a point in the future, any in principle agreement would not necessarily stand, meaning the only actual security Disi's work may be offered must come through the inclusion of his work in the resolutions of the Landmark ordinance attached to Sacred Heart.

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Tetrazzini Coming Back to Sing’. *San Francisco Call*, Volume 94, Number 199, 17 February 1914, page 2

<sup>29</sup> ‘La Sottoscrizione pel monumento a Verdi’. *L'Italia*, Volume 27, Number 137, 19 May 1913, page 4

<sup>30</sup> ‘Un Magnifico Attestato’ *L'Italia*, Volume 31, Number 357, 24 December 1917, page 1

<sup>31</sup> ‘Per gli Esami della Scuola Italiana’. *L'Italia*, Volume 28, Number 131, 12 May 1914

<sup>32</sup> ‘Circle A, Portland's New Club’ *The Pacific Coast Architect*, May 1911, page 72

The quality of Disi's work at Sacred Heart – the care and brilliant evocation of complex themes – cannot be overstated. The rarity that his work survives here, when so much of his oeuvre has been lost, and in such a brilliant example of his artistic expression, warrants serious consideration. The protection of these works should be formalised, not left to chance, through their inclusion in a heritage order.

In his lifetime, Disi was described as a famous painter, an artist of the first rank, and it was written that he produced paintings to outlive the ages.<sup>33</sup> In our own day, these qualities of his work remain, even if they may be veiled, quite literally, by the net that now covers them.

My aim has been to show the importance of Disi as an artist. The plain fact of his significance is demonstrated by his commission across Europe and America. Moreover, through my analysis of the Sacred Heart scenes, it is clear his work is of the highest intellectual and artistic merit – their meaning contained not only within his acts of painting, but amplified across the entire physical space of the nave and Sanctuary of the church. They should be preserved in the space that is intrinsically connected to their meaning.

A journalist writing in 1917 may have best characterised the admiration Disi elicited during his lifetime, writing: “Disi knew how to surround his name with a precious and envied halo, which will hardly be able to darken or change, because his paintings remain as a guarantee, they will not change, but will remain to tell the story of the painter's artistic genius.”<sup>34</sup> This artistic genius still survives into our present. It is written across the ceiling of Sacred Heart. I urge those with executive powers at the Planning department and on the Board of Supervisors to revise the draft ordinance related to the Landmark designation of Sacred Heart to include Disi's work.



Professore Achille Giacomo Disi, c.1909  
Source: The Italian Daily News (L'Italia)

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Alla Mostra Decorativa’, *L'Italia*, Volume 23, Number 254, 30 October 1909, page 1; ‘Bank of Italy's New Building Marks Boost for S.F.’, *San Francisco Call*, Volume 109, Number 148, 28 June 1921, page 5;

‘Paintings to Outlive Ages’, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 August 1914, page 21

<sup>34</sup> ‘Ritorno in Citta Del Prof. A. G. Disi.’ *L'Italia*, Volume 31, Number 58, 27 February 1917, page 4



The Sacred Heart Ceiling, looking towards the Sanctuary



Achille Disi, *Cain and Abel*, Sacred Heart church, San Francisco, 1920

**From:** [Mark De Vitis](#)  
**To:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Fw: Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)  
**Date:** Wednesday, January 3, 2024 11:06:55 AM  
**Attachments:** [DeVitisM\\_SacredHeart.pdf](#)

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**From:** Mark De Vitis  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 4, 2024 6:04 AM  
**To:** (myrna.melgar@sfgov.org) <myrna.melgar@sfgov.org>; Aaron Peskin (Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org) <Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org>; dean.preston@sfgov.org <dean.preston@sfgov.org>; jonh.carroll@sfgov.org <jonh.carroll@sfgov.org>  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)

Dear Supervisors,

I write in regards to the Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES). Several aspects of the draft ordinance require further consideration and amendment. In the attached letter, I present a rundown of my concerns, and evidence supporting the changes I have suggested.

Thank you for taking the time to read through my submission.

Regards,  
Dr. Mark De Vitis

**DR MARK DE VITIS** | Lecturer  
Art History | Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Thursday, 4 January 2024

**Supervisor Myrna Melgar**  
**Supervisor Aaron Peskin**  
**Supervisor Dean Preston**

San Francisco City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place San Francisco, CA 94102

**Re: Sacred Heart Church Complex landmark designation (2015-005890DES)**

Dear Supervisors Melgar, Peskin and Preston,

I write in relation to the matter before the Board of Supervisors Land Use and Transportation Committee regarding the resolution to designate Sacred Heart Parish Church Complex (554 Fillmore Street) as a city landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

Background: In my capacity as a historian – based in the Department of Art History at the University of Sydney, Australia – I can unreservedly affirm the historical significance of the complex. I am currently working on an edited collection to be published through Bloomsbury Academic which includes a focus on the work of Thomas J. Welsh (1845-1918), the architect responsible for Sacred Heart. Welsh was one of the most significant architects working in the Bay Area in the latter half of the nineteenth century, yet precious little of his work remains, as it was greatly impacted by the 1906 earthquake, subsequent quakes, and various fires, as outlined at the end of this document.

Below, I address three areas of concern in response to the draft landmark ordinance covering Sacred Heart.

1. Replacement in-kind: In section 4C of the draft ordinance, it is affirmed that “character defining” features (those covered by the ordinance) will be preserved or “replaced in-kind as determined necessary”. That “character defining” features may be “replaced in-kind” is ill-advised, based on the exceptional and particular qualities of the site, as evidenced by:
  - a. On November 16, 2010, the then Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution to preserve and restore all historic features of the Sacred Heart Church (File Number 100765, Resolution number 538-10).
  - b. Former members of the Board of Supervisors have acknowledged the importance of the architectural heritage of the church. For example, Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi was quoted in the SF Gate: “It’s incredible in regard to architecture, and every effort should be made to save it.” (SF Gate, 6/22/2005)
  - c. In 2012, Sacred Heart was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places. Page 8 of the report commissioned for the nomination affirms, “Sacred Heart Church also appears eligible for listing under Criterion C”. Criterion C is reserved for structures deemed eligible on grounds of Design/Construction. The report continues, characterising the church as distinguished by “innovative planning, advanced construction methods and superior use of materials.”

Based on the evidence presented in this report, Sacred Heart was listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the State Office of Historic Preservation, thereby affirming that it meets Criterion C as established by the U.S. National Park Service. Sacred Heart's "advanced construction" and "superior materials" are thus irreplicable on grounds of Design/Construction, as affirmed by the findings of state and national agencies.

- d. Welsh's work has been widely recognised as worthy of preservation: landmark status awarded to the McMorry-Lagan house (San Francisco Landmark #164); the Burr House in Pacific Heights is listed on the Historical Registry (San Francisco Historical Registry, #31); the Irving M. Scott School (1895) is listed as Historical Landmark #138; the Pioneer Trunk Factory (1902) is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. No church designed by Welsh is to yet receive landmark status (as they have been destroyed or rebuilt, see below), with church architecture being the primary focus of his work.

It is imperative that what remains at Sacred Heart is wholly preserved – the last opportunity to retain Welsh's church architecture.

Considering the evidence provided, replacing existing features "in-kind" contradicts the documented fact of the church's unique material reality. I ask that the condition given in the draft ordinance, that "character-defining" features may be "replaced in-kind", be removed from the ordinance.

2. The church interior: The draft ordinance suggests that there are no features of the interior of the church sufficiently important to warrant preservation. The church has been stripped of elements (potentially unlawfully: City and County of San Francisco Tallis Resolution, file number: 100765). Regardless, as it stands today, the interior of the church remains an expression of Welsh's cutting-edge work, work of the highest class. The interior design of Sacred Heart clearly and forcefully represents his vision as much as the exterior of the building. Failing to preserve the church's interior is akin to preserving the perimeter of a woodland while allowing its interior to be logged. Evidence for the historical significance of the interior of the church is offered below:
  - a. The registration document drawn up to have the church listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior, explicitly states that "detailing on both the exterior and interior" are evidence of high artistic value (page 15).
  - b. Furthermore, the same document gives "The Sacred Heart Church retains ... its character-defining physical features, possessing all seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association" (p.16), while other reports document interior features such as "rare frescos" (City and County of San Francisco Certified Resolution 100765, 11/08/2010, p. 2)
  - c. Covering the Silver Jubilee of the parish, on Monday 22 February 1909, the San Francisco Examiner reported on additions made to the church by the original architect, Thomas J. Welsh in close detail, and affirmed the artistic merit of the interior of the church.

Since at least 1909, it has been recognised that the interior of the church possesses high artistic value and merit, and I ask that the remaining interior features of the church be acknowledged as "character-defining" and thereby covered in the ordinance.

3. Connecting bridge between the Rectory and the Sanctuary: In the draft ordinance, the connecting bridge is not listed as a "character defining feature" of the complex and thus there is no impetus for it to be preserved. Its high level of visibility, having been in place for a hundred years, means it is a distinctive feature of the Alamo Square neighbourhood. I ask that it be included as a "character defining" feature of the complex.

I am grateful to the Board of Supervisors for considering the information I have provided. I would ask that the ordinance be revised in acknowledgment of what is provided herein.

Sincerely,



Dr. Mark De Vitis  
Department of Art History  
The University of Sydney

**Major Welsh church commissions:**

Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (completed 1879-destroyed 1906)  
St Paul's Church, 29<sup>th</sup> and Day (completed 1880- destroyed 1906)  
St Brendan's Church (completed 1879-destroyed 1906)  
St Dominic's Church, Bush and Steiner (completed 1883-destroyed 1906)  
St Mary's Cathedral (completed 1898-destroyed by fire in 1962)  
SS. Peter and Paul Church, Filbert and Grant (completed 1884-replaced 1914)  
St Michael's Church, Livermore, (completed 1891-destroyed by fire in 1916)  
Holy Ghost Church, Fremont (completed 1886 – now destroyed)  
Holy Cross Church, Santa Cruz (completed 1890, damaged 1989 earthquake)  
Dominican Convent, San Rafael (completed 1889-destroyed 1989)

From: [myrna@sfblink.net](mailto:myrna@sfblink.net)  
To: [Melgar, Myrna \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#); [Preston, Dean \(BOS\)](#); [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
Subject: File 231045 Sacred Heart Complex Article 10 Designation  
Date: Monday, December 11, 2023 11:31:32 AM  
Attachments: [USEP - St of Sups File 231045 - Sacred Heart Land Use Comm. 2023](#)

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December 11, 2023

Supervisor Myrna Melgar

Supervisor  
;

Aaron Peskin  
Supervisor Dean Preston  
Land Use & Transportation Committee

San Francisco Board of

San

Supervisors  
Francisco City Hall

1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett

San

Place  
Francisco Ca

Re: File 231045

Dear Friends:

I write you on behalf of the Historic Preservation Fund Committee (HPFC).

In 2015, the HPFC\* initiated, funded and managed a private consultant to prepare the Case Report for this nomination. Prepared in accordance with the Department's requirements and with its encouragement, the resulting 90 plus page document was provided to assist the Department move forward.

Following an initiation of designation by the then HPC in 2016, the nomination has been held by the Department for reasons not always clear to us. The Fund Committee is pleased that it is moving forward at long last.

\* The Historic Preservation Fund Committee is a 7 member grant making body, (including appointments by the Board of Sups and by the Mayor), which came into being to receive the \$2.5 million settlement of the citizen lawsuit over Forrest City Development's violation of the conditions of their approval to construct the shopping center mall on the site of the Category I Emporium Department Store.

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The proposed language provides no guidance as to who makes the decision, how the judgement is made, the conditions needing to be met or the criteria that would apply. The concerns of future Commissions and project sponsors, as well as the public, are at risk when there are no standards or procedure to point to when attempting to engage over future issues which are certain to arise.

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Conceptually speaking, such language is unheard of in modern times. It takes us back to the 1950's, the 1940's and earlier; back before there was a landmark ordinance or any historic preservation planning or policies in San Francisco. Practically speaking, as those with experience on ANY side of the debates or work with historic structures knows, it is almost never possible to genuinely replace in kind. What results is an obvious pastiche.

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***RETURN THE HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT CONNECTING BRIDGE BETWEEN THE RECTORY AND THE SANCTUARY TO THE LIST OF CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES AS CALLED FOR BY THE CASE REPORT.***

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The legitimate basis for identifying and the subsequent objective to retain any given Landmark's "character defining features" is not what an individual staff member, in a given year, or any individual Commissioner, currently serving, likes, thinks cute, fun, trendy or, on the other hand, which they dislike because it isn't grand enough, doesn't suit their preconceived preferences, or simply displeases them for other personal reason(s).

**The inclusion on, or exclusion from, the list of "character defining features" needs to be, (and is required to be), the result of good faith, open minded, professional research and carefully considered judgements, supported by logical and transparent application of consistent reasoning. These named features need to be relevant to the underlying reasons a structure warrants the imposition of public sector restrictions of private property. Owners, project sponsors and the public are entitled to expect and to rely upon that.**

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An upper story architectural element connecting the priests' residence hall and the church itself was built, between 1913 and 1920 to connect the two buildings. (You will note it has a longer association with the complex than 2 of the 4 buildings which are proposed for retention (or in the current version, replication)). In addition, this connecting passageway is closely tied to the social and cultural aspects of the Sacred Heart "complex" which the Case Report presents (and Department staff has embraced) as the reason for inclusion of three of the buildings in the designation.

But in contradiction to their own arguments elsewhere, Staff explicitly asserts the connecting structure has no significance and effectively prohibits it from being taken into account in future Commission deliberations. They continue to offer no rationale or explanation for this contradiction and decline to respond meaningfully to requests for clarification.

The Case Report makes the case it is an integral part of the complex with genuine historic significance and identifies the connecting structure as a "character defining feature". Project sponsor has repeatedly stated they have no objection to and will be retaining it. But if it is not named now, it will not be clearly within the jurisdiction of the current or future Commissions to consider.

**I am confident you share my view that we need the general public, preservation advocates, property owners and project sponsors to perceive the decisions of your Board and all other Commissions as legitimate and believe them based on relevant considerations, consistently applied. If we accept obviously personal, subjective, unsubstantiated and opaque whims to be acceptable sources of regulatory provisions, as has occurred here, we obviously breed disrespect for governmental entities and ultimately disregard of their attempted regulations.**

**Delete the express language in which staff effectively ties the hands of future HPC's to encourage retention of this integral element.**

### ***III INTERIOR FEATURES: A LOST OPPORTUNITY***

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The current proposal, as brought to light by staff only in September states that there are NO features of the church interior sufficiently important to warrant oversight. As there has been no significant changes to it since 2016, this is a surprising change.

Project sponsor states their intention to retain most of the remaining major interior architectural features. However, if those features are not named in this designating ordinance as "character defining features", no current or future HPC will have a clear basis to guide their treatment in future projects and/or under future owners. Failing to name these features now, when an agreeable owner has committed to their retention, is an opportunity needlessly squandered.

I welcome your questions or requests for further information.

Mark Ryser, Chair

Historic Preservation Fund Committee

Cc: John Carroll

December 11, 2023

Supervisor Myrna Melgar  
Supervisor Aaron Peskin ;  
Supervisor Dean Preston

Land Use & Transportation Committee  
San Francisco Board of Supervisors  
San Francisco City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco Ca

Dear Friends:

I write you on behalf of the Historic Preservation Fund Committee (HPFC).

In 2015, the HPFC\* initiated, funded and managed a private consultant to prepare the Case Report for this nomination. Prepared in accordance with the Department's requirements and with its encouragement, the resulting 90 plus page document was provided to assist the Department move forward.

Following an initiation of designation by the then HPC in 2016, the nomination has been held by the Department for reasons not always clear to us. The Fund Committee is pleased that it is moving forward at long last.

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Cc: John Carroll

**From:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**To:** [Carroll, John \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Sacred Heart Parish Church Complex Landmark Designation (2015-005890DES) - BOS File No. 231045  
**Date:** Monday, December 4, 2023 11:19:51 AM  
**Attachments:** [2015-005890DES- SFHeritage-Sacred-Heart-Landmark.pdf](#)

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**From:** Woody LaBounty  
**Sent:** Monday, December 4, 2023 10:45 AM  
**To:** Myrna Melgar ([myrna.melgar@sfgov.org](mailto:myrna.melgar@sfgov.org)) <[myrna.melgar@sfgov.org](mailto:myrna.melgar@sfgov.org)>; Aaron Peskin ([Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org](mailto:Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org)) <[Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org](mailto:Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org)>; [dean.preston@sfgov.org](mailto:dean.preston@sfgov.org); [jonh.carroll@sfgov.org](mailto:jonh.carroll@sfgov.org)  
**Subject:** Sacred Heart Parish Church Complex Landmark Designation (2015-005890DES)

Supervisors,

Currently assigned under the 30-day rule at the Board of Supervisors Land Use and Transportation Committee is a resolution to designate Sacred Heart Parish Church Complex (546-548, 554 Fillmore Street, 735 Fell Street, 660 Oak Street) as a city landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

San Francisco Heritage supports this landmark nomination but requests clarification of an apparent contradiction in the landmark ordinance. We also request changing a phrase included in this and other recent landmark designation ordinances, which we believe could be poorly interpreted and negatively impact historic resources.

Much of the church's interior, a historically public space, merits inclusion in the landmark ordinance. In appreciation and good faith in the owner's plans and intentions to preserve significant interior elements, we are not here challenging the Planning Department's exclusion of interior features.

1. Clarifying and preserving inclusion of the wooden "connector" bridge in the designation

In Section 4(c), the draft landmark ordinance refers to the particular features of the Sacred Heart Church complex to be preserved as listed in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet produced by Planning Department staff dated September 20, 2023. The ordinance then additionally enumerates a list of some of these features including, in Section 4(c)(1)(A)(xi), "Elevated, enclosed bridge connecting the rectory to the choir loft of the church."

But the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet's list of character defining features (beginning on that document's page 4) excludes this wooden connector "bridge" between the choir loft and rectory. The omission is intentional. As explained on page 7 of the packet's case report of October 5, 2016, staff asserts the connector "has not taken on significance over time."

San Francisco Heritage disagrees. The connecting bridge was an integral part of the complex within the determined period of significance and is prominent on the Fillmore side elevation.

The owner has expressed to us they have no objection to the wooden connector being included in the landmark ordinance.

San Francisco Heritage requests the “Elevated, enclosed bridge connecting the rectory to the choir loft of the church bridge” remain as part of the landmark ordinance in Section 4(c)(1)(A)(xi) and be expressly included in your approval.

2. Definition of who determines the need for “replacement in-kind”

Section 4(c) of the draft ordinance includes a vague phrase used frequently in recent city landmark ordinances which deserves clarification and change:

“The particular features that shall be preserved, or replaced in-kind as *determined necessary*, are those shown in photographs...” (italics added).

*The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Restoration and Guidelines for Restoring Historic Buildings* prioritizes protection, maintenance, and restoration of materials and features *before* any replacement is considered. “Determined necessary” here, and in other sections of the ordinance, does not define *who* decides on the need for replacement of historic features.

Review by preservation professionals at the Planning Department and possible approval by the Historic Preservation Commission are key protections offered by Article 10 landmark designations. Calling out that preservation expertise is required to determine the need for a “replacement in-kind” will prevent unnecessary destructive actions due to ignorance or willful subversion of the ordinance’s intent.

San Francisco Heritage requests modification of this phrase and is confident the City Attorney can suggest acceptable changes made as a condition of your approval.

The Sacred Heart Parish Church Complex is worthy of city landmark status. With attention to the two points above, San Francisco Heritage is very supportive of a designation under Article 10 of the Planning Code.

**Woody LaBounty**  
**President & CEO**



SAN FRANCISCO HERITAGE | [SFHeritage.org](http://SFHeritage.org)

On Unceded Ramaytush Ohlone Land

HAAS-LILIENTHAL HOUSE  
2007 FRANKLIN STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94109

+1 (415) 441-3000 x15 (office)

[wlabounty@sfheritage.org](mailto:wlabounty@sfheritage.org)

*He/Him/His*



November 29, 2023

Supervisor Myrna Melgar  
Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
Supervisor Dean Preston  
San Francisco City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

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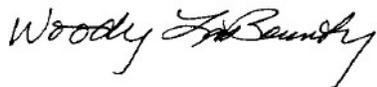
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