

Janzen, Heather

From: City Council
Subject: FW: Email - Communication - Michelle Aalders - Amendment to Bylaw Heritage Designation on the Organ - CK 710-60
Attachments: Letter to City Council in support of keeping heritage designation of the organ at Former 3rd Ave United Church.pdf

From: Web NoReply <web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca>
Sent: Monday, October 23, 2023 1:59 PM
To: City Council <City.Council@Saskatoon.ca>
Subject: Email - Communication - Michelle Aalders - Amendment to Bylaw Heritage Designation on the Organ - CK 710-60

--- Replies to this email will go to [REDACTED] ---

Submitted on Monday, October 23, 2023 - 13:56

Submitted by user: [REDACTED]

Submitted values are:

I have read and understand the above statements.: Yes

I do not want my comments placed on a public agenda. They will be shared with members of Council through their online repository.: No

I only want my comments shared with the Mayor or my Ward Councillor.: No

Date: Monday, October 23, 2023

To: His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

Pronouns: She/her/hers

First Name: Michelle

Last Name: Aalders

Phonetic spelling of first and/or last name: Allders (last name)m

Email: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED] Lynd Cresc

City: Saskatoon

Province: Saskatchewan

Postal Code: [REDACTED]

What do you wish to do ?: Submit Comments

What meeting do you wish to speak/submit comments ? (if known):: Wednesday, Oct. 25th City Council Regular Business Meeting

What agenda item do you wish to comment on ?: Amendment to Bylaw regarding TAUC Heritage Designation on the organ

Comments:

I am attaching a letter which also includes a link to a Facebook "Letter of Support" for the heritage status of the organ to remain in tact. There is also a hard copy letter of support inserted into the document. I will also be speaking in person which I submitted as a separate request and this has already been approved.

Attachments:

- [Letter to City Council in support of keeping heritage designation of the organ at Former 3rd Ave United Church.pdf](#)2.47 MB

Will you be submitting a video to be vetted prior to council meeting?: No

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Dear City Council,

It was only a few weeks ago that I learned about the request for de-designation of heritage-status on the former 3rd Ave United Church organ. Many community members are just learning about this now, and the reactions from so many continue to be those of shock, disbelief and disappointment.

The first letter submitted by St. Vincent of Lerens Orthodox Church purported that the organ was not in its original form and shouldn't be considered heritage and that it would need to be shipped to Quebec for complete overhaul at a cost of a million dollars. This was shown to simply not be true. Now the emphasis is on the cost to repair it. The latest numbers given seem to highlight the full restoration price of \$300,000, but the organ does not need a full restoration to be played. This would be a wonderful dream if it was being used on a regular basis. But it really only needs financial support primarily for the initial repairs on the electrical system which was quoted at approximately \$80,000, It certainly wouldn't hurt to get a second quote on this, as this seems high to me. There are Casavant specialists in Calgary who come and work on the organs at Knox and Grace Westminster United Churches. This is another avenue that can be explored.

That being said, Father Herman Fields said that it doesn't matter if it costs \$1000 or \$1 million dollars, they are not willing to put any money toward it. So what are our other options? Has an appeal ever been made to the public for assistance? What about a "Go-fund-me" page ? There are grants available through the Heritage Society. What about a fundraising concert? The current owners do not "rent" out their space and it says this very thing on their website. Yes they are hosting their own a cappella choral concerts, but they do not seem to be renting out the church for other musicians to hold concerts. Rental of the space for concerts was an important source of income for our church. These funds went toward operating costs, repairs, and maintenance including the organ. We were also a not-for-profit organization. The donations of our congregants helped keep that building going for over 100 years. I can only imagine the cost, labour and craftsmanship it took to build this Gothic masterpiece in the first place.

I would still like to go in and play the organ and see for myself the state that it is in. And other organists have shown an interest also. In a CBC interview it was mentioned that several organists were approached to play it. I am curious who they were. I know I was not one of them. I held a Gala Farewell Concert in 2018 in which many musicians from the community performed, including myself and other organists. The church was packed. And at the final church service we also had a church full of interested community members, former organists, choir members and ministers. After the church closed I was grieving the loss of my congregation, and the building and it was too difficult emotionally for me to go there to play the organ. And then there was Covid. And now I feel like this so-called "lack of interest" in playing is being used as an excuse for the organ to be "written off".

We fought hard to keep this building as our space of worship and for the community. Our board members and trustees went through years of turmoil trying to do what was best, There were two bids on the building. The decision was not unanimous, but the higher bid won out as the thought was that the extra funds would go to more community organizations in need, and to other United Churches in the City who were thriving. Then the first owner defaulted on the loan and forfeited the building to his loaners. At this point the building was taken over by people who had no interest in the building, nor were they willing to put any money into repairs. Eventually those folks defaulted on the payments of taxes, etc, and the trustees took over the mortgage. In the meantime, our wonderful heritage society and community members who helped on that committee fought hard for heritage designation to protect the building and the

hammer beams, and organ. The trustees continued to look for a buyer. There was another potential buyer to the building who claimed to support the arts and would hold concerts there, but that also fell through. In good faith, our trustees sold the building to a church who stated they understood the heritage designation of the organ and that they would become caretakers of this instrument while owning the building. They were also told about the condition of the organ and building at the time. No secrets were kept. It is my belief that the trustees would not have sold the building to someone if they thought they would renege on their agreement and try to remove the organ. So after such a long heart-breaking struggle to protect this building and organ, how is it that the city council can so easily agree to remove the designation after just a few meetings? Some of your own council questioned whether they had the expertise to make such a decision.

I recently posted a letter of support on my Facebook page saying that we would like to ensure that the designation of the heritage status stay on the organ as it is a character defining historic element of the building. In only 2 days, nearly 100 people signed this letter. Several music teachers also signed a hard copy of the letter. Many of these music teachers were there when I gave my presentation on the 100th anniversary of the organ. They were delighted to see the inner workings of the organ and experience it's glory from the choir loft. I am so encouraged by the amount of community support shown for this amazing instrument. And then I received a phone call of concern from Jim Start. He was a member of 3rd Avenue United Church for over 50 years. He was the caretaker of this organ. He was there in 1981 when they re-leathered the organ and pulled the floor boards up. He often called the Casavant specialist in Calgary to come and work on the organ whenever needed. He was hurt to hear how the current owners thought we neglected it. I know Jim always asked how the organ was doing and if it needed anything. Jim apologized because he felt he couldn't write a letter since he is now considered legally blind so I told him I would speak on his behalf. He knows the history of the organ and he is a great resource who should be consulted.

I also read a comment on my letter of support from Helen Few. Helen was baptized at Third Avenue United Church in 1934. She said "The organ was the heart of the church. 'Holy, Holy, Holy' on Sunday morning, you knew you were home. The glorious music of the organ enhanced Sunday school graduations, Christmas concerts and pageants. We were thrilled to hear organ recitals and famous guest organists. I remember that my son Guy often played trumpet with Michelle at the organ on Christmas Eve. I remember when they tuned the organ they invited my husband Allan to enter the sacred home of the pipes to observe the process. He was thrilled!! I remember the WAR YEARS. Members of the Military often came Sunday morning. They always commented on the awesome organ music.' Please keep this organ of memories safe."

I was the organist at 3rd Avenue United for only 15 years. I say only because that is a small portion of time compared to 106 years that the organ was active. I played for hundreds of weddings, church services and concerts- in particular the Thursdays at Third Avenue noon hour concerts often featuring the organ. These were free concerts for the public. The Saskatoon Brass Band attended our Remembrance Day services and played along with the organ. I had two organists playing the organ there at my own wedding. And the Saskatoon Children's Choir used the organ for all of their "Sing Choirs of Angels" Christmas concerts. There were the nurses reunions, the graduations, covenanting services, and funerals (including my own father-in-law and the 16 year old daughter of our former secretary). The organ was used to praise God and to bring joy and comfort to the community. And the aesthetic beauty and architectural magnificence was photographed and appreciated by so many people who were able to enjoy that space.

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And what about the acoustical implications of removing the organ. Removal of the wooden pews has already effected acoustics (not to mention seating capacity for concerts), but certainly removal of the organ would impact the acoustical integrity also. And then there is the cost of removal. The cost to remove the organ properly would be significant. Right now it does not cost the current owners anything to keep the organ there. If the organ was always standing in the way of meeting their liturgical needs, and it was never going to be used, then why purchase this building in the first place. An agreement was made and now it is being broken, and the “undoing” of this agreement is receiving support from the city council. What is the purpose of receiving heritage status if it can so easily be amended after only 2 years of ownership? This is a dangerous precedent being set. Heritage designations on other building elements may be at risk in the future. We need to think past the current ownership. The organ has been there for 110 years. It was made to fit this building and this acoustic. It is a treasure for the city that should not be removed just because it is not currently being used, or that it doesn't fit the current owners liturgical ideal. On behalf of the musical community I plead with you to reconsider the amendment of the bylaw and keep the heritage designation on the organ.

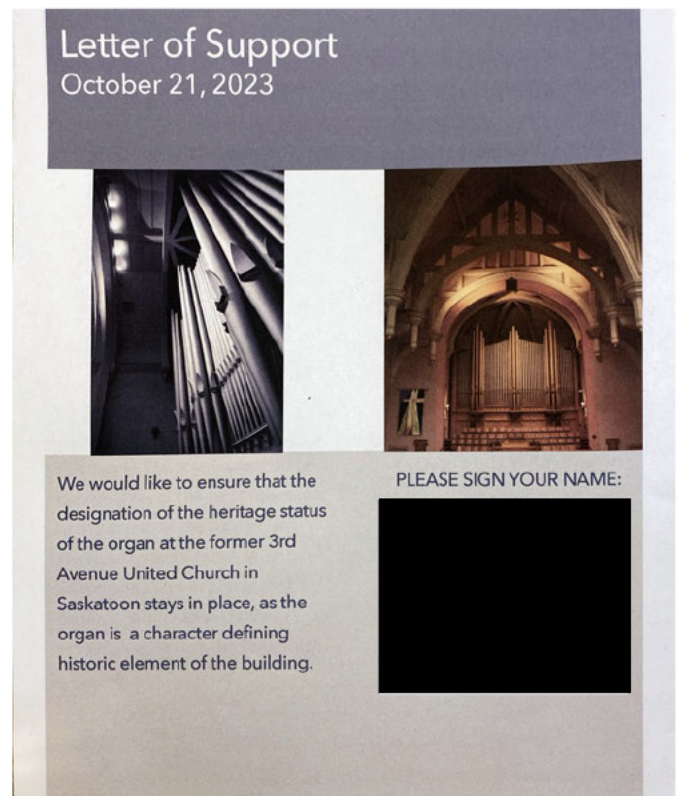
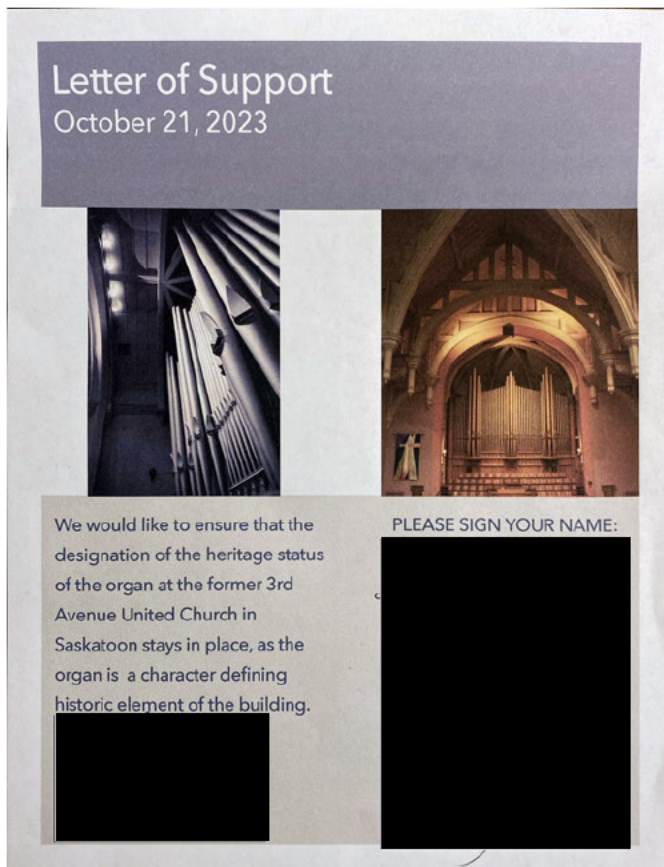
With great sincerity and concern,

Michelle Aalders
Organist at the former 3rd Avenue United Church (2003-2018)

Link to Facebook letter of support:

<https://www.facebook.com/609558498/posts/pfbid0373axvfAvxJhNJE2NKnD4QBmkjRMI7JJLRzWjSgZMJPG4cYWNpbqi35Kyt7mLzDSWI/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>

Hard copy of Letter of Support with Signatures: (plus Kathleen Bender's signature via e-mail)



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