

May 7, 2023.
Thunder Bay

North York Community Council

Toronto City Hall
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Attention: Matthew Green and Members:
James Pasternak- Chair, Mike Cole- Vice Chair, Jon Burnside,
Shelley Carroll, Lily Cheng, Mike Colle, Jaye Robinson

Subject: **NY5.30**
Inclusion on the Heritage Register:
817 Mount Pleasant Road, St. Peter's Estonian Lutheran Church
(Ward 15) Don Valley West

Dear Board Members of North York Community Council,

I am writing to the Board to offer my thoughts and reasoning to consider Heritage Status protection of this small Church from a background in architecture and as a child of World War II Displaced Persons. My Mother and Father are Estonians. I am a Canadian-Estonian.

Architect Michael Bach created the design of St. Peter's Estonian Lutheran Church in the era of an architectural renaissance. After the devastation of a World War, Architects took their place in the world to solve the problems of destruction. Resurrecting and planning the infrastructure of cities and building humanistic housing. Churches became the focus of the communities for the "New Canadians".

The Toronto Estonians of the Lutheran faith began to plan a new home of worship.
"Peetri Kirik", St. Peter's on 817 Mt. Pleasant Road.

We learn in architecture school, never judge architecture unless you have been to the site and dwelled in the space. Using the current lexicon of our times:
"One must experience the vibe of St. Peter's".

Canada has always looked towards Scandinavia for inspiration and construction techniques as we share the unique placement in the northern hemisphere's belt of timber forests. We all build with wood. An important and regenerative resource for Canada's economic wealth. This building can meet the designated criteria of potential Heritage status on all points of academic discourse:

- Architectural ‘materiality and built form’, the specialized wood structure of Glulam arches and copper roof defines a vibrant period of Toronto’s architectural history, the Toronto City Hall by Finnish Architect Viljo Revell would be recognized ten years later as ‘Iconic Architecture’ around the world.
- Architecture of worship, Lutheran roots of a Nordic religion with pagan underpinnings; “We are still in the forest”.
- St. Peter’s Church is Estonian-Canadian Architect Michael Bach’s “life achievement”. The scale of this building, his attention to interior details, the mood he created by the assemblage of materials *is* genius.

After all the academic discourse, it still comes down to the People.

To attend the Christmas Eve service and Mother’s Day, the high point in Estonian Culture, to dwell in this space all together *is a transcendent experience that no member of our community would deny.*

I would like to propose to the Members of the Heritage Board to take the TTC, one of the Church’s best attributes of accessibility and visit the site:

Outside the Church . . . walk about the Columbarium and read the unusual names of a generation who made their contributions in all fields and enterprise to a city, envied around the world for its vital and dynamic multi-cultural citizenry.

Open the rusticated door, the portal . . . enter the foyer . . . a low ceiling, classic influence from Architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

You will experience compression before the volume of the Nave . . . some consider the form an overturned boat.

The wood floors are dry . . . the friendly creaking under your footsteps.

Choose a place to sit . . . skooch along the wood pews burnished by wool coats every Sunday for almost 70 years.

Consider the delicate honeyed lighting . . . reflecting from all the wood, the Holy Trinity of “threes” expressed in light fixtures.

The play of light on the altar wall . . . subtle . . . very unusual in the vestry, “sunlight through the forest.”

Imagine the acoustics of the choir . . . hear the deep resonant chords of the pipe organ.

Everyone together to share this communal moment of prayer and reflection.

Again, no one in our community denies the power of those moments together.

As an architect, I am aware of the cultural costs many years later of buildings and ideas destroyed by want of more.

In Manhattan New York, one encounters the remnants of another era, tiny churches blackened by the grime of time, still stand with graveyards in between the towering superstructures. They remind us *from whence we came*. We take pause.

The People of Estonia lost EVERYTHING on September 2, 1945.
They lost their country. They lost their place in the world. They lost their homes.
Many were separated from their families *forever*.

Myself, as a child, I wondered what my Grandfather was doing
sitting behind an *iron curtain*, was it made of chains?

This small intimate Church built of wood offers architecture of opportunity, a *sanctuary*, in a bustling metropolis. It should be preserved under the designation of Heritage Status as a Memorial to the spirit of a people and their determination, hope for a new life in Canada and faith, for a future.

Thank you for consideration.
Yours very truly,

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This is my Church

