

August 20, 2021

Dear Friends of the Bell Tower,

The following information is a long, but very important read regarding the fate of the bell tower. We hope that you will take the time to read it. Here is a brief overview of the information for your convenience:

- Julie Cromwell & Associates (JCA), a reputable local engineering firm, has created a solution that would save the bell tower
- The City's Chief Building Official has officially acknowledged that JCA's approach meets the City's code requirements
- We have secured the necessary funding to support the stabilization and restoration work as proposed by JCA, which would repair the tower back to its original condition and add additional structural support
- We have secured a contractor who is willing to mobilize to begin stabilization work immediately
- Knowing this, FLC leadership stands by the June 23 decision to demolish the tower

Last week we shared with you that the FLC leadership team rejected our latest proposal, which outlined a new approach (JCA's solution) to saving the tower and was supported by the necessary funding. You responded swiftly with calls and messages to the church urging them to reconsider. Because of your persistence, on August 12 the FLC leadership team agreed to send the second engineering report to Mr. Art Dahlberg, Director of Buildings & Inspections for the City of Cincinnati, for review and consideration.

On Monday, August 16, the church received a response from Mr. Dahlberg recognizing that both JCA and the original engineering firm were "highly respected and have continuously delivered code compliant solutions for various projects." He went on to further state, "the repair work does need to resolve the water infiltration issues and restore the structural system to conditions equivalent to those that existed during the original construction." Both engineering approaches include this scope of work.

So what's the issue?

The original engineering approach called for work that far exceeds what is required by the building code. A significant portion of that additional work is meant to add seismic upgrades that are not typically part of a historic restoration project, and are not required by the code. This additional work drove the cost of the project up by approximately \$1 million. JCA is the second engineer, brought to the project by the Save the Bell Tower team. The JCA approach also exceeds the building code requirements, but does not include unnecessary seismic work. It preserves the tower in a safe and cost-effective manner.

Yesterday, August 19, our team learned that, **despite the new information from the city and the public's calls to save the tower, the leadership team would stand by the June 23 demolition decision.** They provided no further statement other than to reaffirm the details of the Emergency Hazard Abatement Order issued on November 10, 2020.

We quickly responded to their message imploring them to reconsider and provided them potential solutions in the hopes of securing a favorable outcome, including:

- Obtaining a third, independent, engineering opinion, paid for by our team
- Allowing the church congregation to vote on which approach to take
- Providing transparency and rationale for their decision
- Beginning the stabilization work immediately, with their permission

Additionally, we've repeatedly asked for the opportunity to:

- Arrange a meeting between the two engineering firms and FLC to discuss a joint approach
- Host Zoom meetings with our team and/or community supporters

We have given the leadership team an opportunity to respond and they have declined.

Our approach throughout this journey has been to remain transparent to our community supporters. We have provided updates along the way that we felt were of significant importance and withheld some information out of respect for the leadership team and the process we were working through.

Now that the lines of communication have been closed, we feel it is prudent to provide you with the details we have shared with them since the June 23 decision on demolition was made.

Attached you will find:

- The [JCA engineering report](#), paid for by our team
- The [proposal we submitted to the FLC leadership](#) on August 4, highlighting our sources and uses of funds to save the tower
- The [letter sent by Mr. Art Dahlberg to FLC on August 16](#), stating his position that both engineering approaches meet the City's code requirements

It is important to note that tearing down the tower will result in the loss of:

- A \$250,000 Partnership for Sacred Spaces grant, currently pending. This grant application was pursued and submitted by our team on FLC's behalf.
- Eligibility for any historic tax credits for any past or future work to the church. Our team has set the stage for FLC to recoup tax credit monies from earlier work done to the church, as well as tax credit monies for the proposed scope of stabilization and restoration work.
- Any pledges committed or funds donated to the Save the Bell Tower partners that were earmarked for saving the tower.
- A loss of community funding. Community and philanthropic support for future church projects will be a challenge in the aftermath of the demolition when alternatives existed.

To date, bell tower supporters have raised \$1.432 million through a mostly grassroots campaign. Under normal circumstances, a philanthropic campaign to raise funds of this size would take substantially longer than the time we've had. The strong support received, despite the constrained circumstances, is indicative of the community's interest in this historic asset, and provides confidence in the success of the fundraising efforts for the next phases of work.

Our team has collectively put in hundreds of hours soliciting donations, meeting with city and community leaders, securing a temporary church home at The Transept, and researching/obtaining expert opinions on alternative paths to save the tower. We feel we have arrived at the most responsible approach to stewarding these funds, one that fully restores the bell tower back to its original condition, meets all city safety requirements, adds additional structural enhancements, and avoids wasteful spending on unnecessary engineering.

So what happens now?

Time is running out to save the bell tower. Demolition agreements have been signed and permits have been secured. Work is expected to begin any day.

Both engineering firms agree there are immediate repairs required, based on water infiltration and time itself. However, these repairs are not related to a missing seismic or lateral load system. The repairs should move forward to bring the structure back to its original condition. With that in mind:

- Teams are in place to immediately begin restoration
- Funding is in place to remediate the immediate structural issues
- We can stabilize and restore the tower without any seismic work

Our hope in releasing this information is that it will further inspire community action. We will release a similar message to local media and the Save the Bell Tower Facebook page. In the meantime, we encourage you to:

- Send a letter of support to local media, including opinion pieces
- Spread the word to your friends and colleagues
- Make a pledge to help fund the restoration if FLC changes their plan

Other actions such as an appeal of the city's demolition permits and protests are being considered. If you want to lend your support in those ways, feel free to let us know. And of course, if you have ideas or thoughts to share with FLC directly, contact information can be found here: firstlutherancincy.org/faith.

We remain committed to preserving this historical and cultural icon, welcoming visitors to the front porch of Washington Park as they step off the streetcar.

We are forever grateful for your continued support and faith you have put in us to secure a path to preservation. We remain hopeful that there is still a path to stabilization and restoration until the tower no longer stands.