

Via Email (johnghd@yahoo.com) and First Class Mail

March 19, 2015

Mr. John Haigis  
Friends of the Blue Bell  
1006 Main Street  
Darby, Pennsylvania 19023-1503

Re: Visual Condition Assessment  
1000 Main Street, Darby, Pennsylvania  
WJE No. 2015.1003.0

Dear Mr. Haigis:

At your request, the firm of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) has performed a visual condition assessment of the building located at 1000 Main Street in Darby, Pennsylvania. The building is leased by Friends of the Blue Bell from Darby Borough, but is not currently occupied on a regular basis. The purpose of WJE's assessment was to evaluate the potential for the building to be reoccupied. Our assessment consisted of a one-day site visit and a review of the "Historic Assessment Report" prepared by Kise Straw & Kolodner (KS&K) and dated January 15, 2002, and a follow-up memo describing a reduced scope of repair work, dated February 14, 2002. This letter provides a summary of WJE's observations, findings, and recommendations.

## **Description of Structure and Background**

According to the KS&K report, the original section of the building (Section 1) was constructed as a residence around 1850. This section is L-shaped in plan and has two full stories plus a finished attic above grade, which are wood-framed. The basement is mostly below grade and is surrounded by stone rubble foundation walls. A second major section (Section 2), with one wood-framed story above grade and a similar basement, was built at the inside corner of the "L" around 1910.

The KS&K report indicates that seven minor additions were constructed at the first- and second-floor levels between the late nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth. These additions are typically wood-framed and do not include basements. The foundations of the additions appear to consist of various masonry walls and piers, most likely bearing directly on subgrade soil or on shallow footings. At some point during the mid-twentieth century, portions of the building were reportedly adapted for use as a doctor's office, although spaces on the upper floors remained in residential use as the doctor's living quarters. The building was reportedly adapted again into apartments, but that date, and the date on which the building ceased to be occupied on a regular basis, are not known.

Exterior walls are typically covered with cement plaster (stucco) over wood sheathing and/or siding. Steeply sloped roof surfaces over the main section and the earlier additions are typically covered with painted standing-seam sheet metal roofing. Portions of the sheet metal on the main gable were reportedly damaged by wind in 2004 and were covered by a succession of tarps that have since been replaced with EPDM roofing. Roof surfaces on later additions are covered with asphalt roll or shingle roofing.

## Site Observations

Mr. Justin M. Spivey, P.E., of WJE visited the subject property on February 20, 2015. You provided access to the property and background information. Dr. Aaron Wunsch, Assistant Professor of Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania, was also present.

WJE's assessment was limited to a visual examination of selected accessible areas at the exterior and interior of the subject building. Our observations were limited to visibly apparent structural conditions only. Architectural finishes, movable furnishings, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems were not inspected by WJE and are beyond the scope of this assessment. The subject property was not reviewed for compliance with any governing codes or regulations. Evaluation of potentially hazardous substances such as lead paint, mold, asbestos, etc., was not performed by WJE and is beyond the scope of our work.

The conditions observed during WJE's site visit were generally consistent with those reported by KS&K in 2002. WJE also noted that some interior finishes and floor sheathing were subsequently removed, apparently in order to salvage copper electrical and plumbing components. The most significant deterioration of wood structural members due to water infiltration appears to be concentrated in three areas: (1) roof and floor framing beneath a previous roof leak at the inside corner of the "L," (2) roof and wall framing beneath a roof leak at the northeast corner of the main gable, and (3) the south wall and floor of Addition 5 in the middle portion of the south elevation.

In the first two areas, the roof leaks were reportedly addressed by the EPDM roofing. Deterioration appears to be localized in members directly exposed to water infiltration, and there was no visible evidence of structural movement or distress in adjacent areas. Although the south wall, floor, and roof of Addition 5 have experienced significant structural movement as a consequence of deterioration, we did not note any substantial structural distress that would indicate that a major instability is imminent in any other portion of the building.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on WJE's limited visual condition assessment, it is our opinion that the subject building can be returned to the residential and/or office use for which it was last considered safe to occupy with localized structural repairs, roof repair or replacement, and interior renovations including the installation of new plumbing and electrical systems. Restoring a watertight building envelope and repairing deteriorated structural members should be the first priority. Further evaluation is needed in order to develop a detailed scope of repair and renovation work, or to determine what alterations may be required to accommodate any contemplated change in use. The scope of work and cost estimate in the KS&K report and follow-up memo are now somewhat outdated, but could be updated to account for current conditions and construction costs.

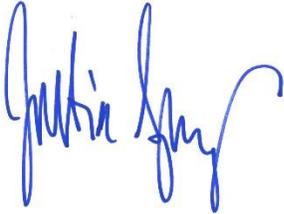
Although the KS&K report recommends demolition of Section 2 and the seven additions, WJE recommends against demolishing any portion of the building without careful consideration, as this may alter existing site drainage patterns or expose previously concealed surfaces that were not intended to be weather-resistant, resulting in collateral damage to the portions of the building that remain. This is particularly critical in the case of Section 2, as filling the basement with soil could exert lateral earth pressures that the foundation walls of Section 1 are not capable of resisting. Instead of demolishing Addition 5, we recommend that it be repaired or temporarily shored until the potential adverse impacts of its removal can be properly evaluated and mitigated. In the meantime, occupancy of Addition 5 should not be permitted.

The findings and opinions presented in this letter are based on WJE's limited visual condition assessment and our review of the KS&K report and memo. This letter may be amended or supplemented based on additional information made available to WJE.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide our professional services. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

**WISS, JANNEY, ELSTNER ASSOCIATES, INC.**



Justin M. Spivey, P.E.  
Senior Associate

cc: Dr. Aaron Wunsch, University of Pennsylvania (wunsch@design.upenn.edu)