

BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION JUNE 27, 2023

TESTIMONY by Ellen Hume

Re: Nazzaro Community Center Study Report

My neighbors and I strongly support the recommendations of the study report being considered today by the Landmarks Commission regarding the Nazzaro Community Building at 30 N Bennet St., North End, Boston. We thank the Landmarks Commission staff for such a thorough and important study of this property, and also thank so many others in Boston, from our North End community to our elected officials, for making these recommendation possible.

As your study report notes: “The building has always been a dedicated public space, serving as a center of community, heritage recognition, and sense of place.” We are working together to keep it so.

The study report notes that the beautiful Nazzaro building has **architectural significance** as “an excellent example of early 20th-century Beaux-Arts Renaissance Revival architecture. “ Architect Charles Donagh Maginnis was himself an Irish immigrant. His firm, Maginnis & Walsh, and went on to attain national recognition for church designs and college campus buildings and became a leading architectural firm of the first half of the 20th century .

The Nazzaro building’s **regional and local historic significance** is well documented in the study report. It is located at the center of Boston’s oldest neighborhood, which is noted not just for its colonial era Freedom trail monuments, but also its immigrant history. This building is at the heart of that nationally significant immigrant history. As a public bath house and gymnasium, the Nazzaro building was opened in 1910 to address the health and welfare of the city’s tenement population, with their lack of bathing and gym facilities, a real concern due to epidemics.

As the study report notes: “The Nazzaro Community Center is a distinguished example of the Renaissance Revival and Beaux-Arts architectural styles of the early 20th century; it is exemplary in its material, craftsmanship, and integrity. Despite interior renovations, the exterior of the building retains almost all its original 1907 architectural features, including terra-cotta ornamentation that represents the high level of craftsmanship associated with the emerging Arts and Crafts movement. In addition, the building is representative of the later work of the Boston architectural firm of Maginnis, Walsh, and Sullivan, which was renowned regionally and nationally for its designs.”

It wasn’t mentioned in the report, but I would like to add that this original North End Bath House was renamed in the modern era for the late Michael Nazzaro, a local North Ender who worked to preserve his neighborhood’s historic buildngs during a time of urban renewal. In his spirit, we garnered some 1,500 signatures on two petitions in 2018 to submit our application with the Landmarks Commission in January 2019. We were thrilled when in January 2023, state

Representative Aaron Michlewitz (Third Suffolk District) announced the the City of Boston's plans to spend \$5 million to refurbish the Nazzaro building and retain it for community programs --with the caveat that these funds are allocated ONLY IF it is landmarked. He is also helping the city find new appropriate tenants for the building such as the North End Waterfront Health Clinic and the North End Music and Performance Center, to carry on its public service. We would like also to thank Sen. Lydia Edwards, who has been advising and supporting our efforts throughout, City Councilor Gabriella Coletta, their staffs, current Landmarks Commissioner and North End resident Kirsten Hoffman, former Commissioner Tom Herman, the North End Waterfront Residents Association, the North End Waterfront City Council; and the Boston Architectural College, who provided us with pro-bono design ideas for a newly repurposed, architecturally preserved, Nazzaro Community Center.

We are deeply grateful for the Landmark Commission staff's proposal to protect this building with Landmark status, as well as ensuring that it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. We hope the Commission will prompt the city to establish a preservation plan for the building as it is to be repurposed and updated, adding historical interpretive materials at the site. We stand ready to help with next steps in the process.

Thank you.

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