

January 13, 2026

Michael Lambert

Peterborough Unitarian Universalist Church

25 Main Street

Peterborough, NH 03458

RE: Proposed Elimination of Chancel Arch Columns

Mr. Lambert:

Consideration is being given to the removal of the non-structural columns associated with the Palladian-style arched opening at the chancel. This arched recess was introduced during the 1924 Colonial Revival renovation and was inspired by the Palladian window motif, traditionally composed of a central arched opening flanked by two rectangular openings. The existing columns are decorative in nature and do not contribute to the structural integrity of the opening; their removal will therefore have no adverse impact on the building's structural performance.

While the arched recess reflects a later phase in the building's evolution, its architectural significance is limited. The proportions, scale, and detailing of the opening deviate from established Palladian precedents, resulting in an interpretation that is stylistically referential rather than historically accurate. As such, the feature does not rise to the level of a character-defining element of the building.

There is well-established historic and preservation precedent for the selective removal or modification of non-structural, non-character-defining elements introduced during later renovations, particularly when such elements diminish spatial clarity or functional flexibility. Preservation standards and best practices acknowledge that historic buildings evolve over time and that carefully considered, well-documented, and reversible alterations may be appropriate when they support the building's ongoing use and stewardship.

In this instance, removal of the non-structural columns would provide a tangible benefit to the church by increasing the openness and functional flexibility of the chancel. A more open chancel supports a wider range of liturgical, musical, and ceremonial uses, improves visual continuity within the sanctuary, and enhances the congregation's experience of the space. This measured intervention balances respect for the building's historic fabric with the practical and spiritual needs of the church and is consistent with accepted architectural and preservation practices.

Should you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Regards,

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