

DAVID V. UHLEIN, JR.
Suite 400
322 East Michigan Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

December 13, 2010

Historic Preservation Commission
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Re: File No. 100877
East Side Commercial Historic District
Proposed Marriott Hotel at Wisconsin Avenue

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am the owner of the McGeoch Building at 322 East Michigan Street. Located on the Southeast corner of the block bounded by Wisconsin Avenue, Broadway, and Milwaukee Streets, it is one of the more prominent historic buildings in the East Side Commercial Historic District.

The announcement of a planned 200 room Marriott Hotel on this block causes me grave concern, not about the proposed hotel itself, but for the way that it is being planned. I would welcome a hotel on my block, but only if it is developed with due respect for the important historic fabric in this part of our City.

When I purchased the McGeoch Building, an historic printer's loft building, I anticipated the City's creation of the East Side Historic District to protect the context and spur the redevelopment of that block and the rest of the Historic District. Since the Historic District was created, I have continued to invest in the McGeoch Building in reliance on the protection that the Historic District is supposed to provide. I looked forward to realizing the proven historic preservation benefits of enhanced tourism, job creation, sustainable adaptive reuse, and economic development that come from the preservation of our history. I know that the architecture of the early 20th century speaks loudly to small businesses, tourists, and convention planners, because of its human scale, rich ornamentation, and psychological comfort. I believe the City of Milwaukee knows that as well, or our Historic Districts would not have been created.

I have been an architect in Milwaukee for over 35 years, and I have focused my practice on preserving and reusing historic structures of various types.

Our firm has found ways to re-develop many historic properties in commercially successful ways a prime example being the 130 room Marriott Residence Inn developed in the former Gimbels Department Store, only three blocks west on Wisconsin Avenue from these buildings.

In my professional opinion, the buildings that have been proposed for demolition as part of this hotel project are still in excellent shape, having survived for over 100 years. While underutilized, they seek a more sympathetic ownership to take advantage of their historic significance and appeal. The Johnson Bank Building looked much like these buildings do now before it was re-developed by the Bank just a few years ago.

The City of Milwaukee clearly supports historic preservation. Beside adopting our historic preservation ordinances and creating our Historic Districts, including this one, the City, just two months ago adopted a Downtown Plan Update that states "Locally designated contributing historic buildings should be retained and redeveloped in accordance with local preservation requirements." The Update even has a picture of the Wisconsin Avenue properties in question with the caption "Renovated Johnson Bank at corner and other similar era buildings awaiting renovation." The update also recommends that steps be taken to "Preserve and enhance the buildings of the nationally and locally designated East Side Commercial Historic District." It is clear that the policies adopted by the City of Milwaukee over many years and recently reinforced by the Downtown Plan Update, demand the preservation of the historic architecture of these buildings.

The proposed destruction of these five historic properties that are deemed "outdated" by the developer flies in the face of all that we have learned in Milwaukee and across the Country about the power of Historic Preservation. There is a better way to execute this hotel project, which retains the historic facades, preserves the scale of the Historic District, and respects the urban "edge" created by the historic buildings in this area.

In my view, if this project is executed as currently proposed, it will destroy a significant portion of our invaluable historic fabric and be a missed opportunity for enlightened urban development. That opportunity can be realized by preserving the historic facades and supporting structure and developing the proposed hotel behind them. There are many examples of similar historic preservation and redevelopment projects that have been successful in other cities. The City of Milwaukee even approved a similar redevelopment plan last year for the Goll Mansion on Prospect Avenue.

I am convinced that a similar historic preservation and redevelopment program would be feasible for the proposed Marriott Hotel, and my firm has completed a preliminary study of how such a program would work.

Our City ordinances are supposed to establish rules that we can rely on, and I relied on the City's creation of this historic district and the protections that it was intended to provide to my property and me. If multiple buildings in one of our Historic Districts can be as easily demolished as the developer here desires, then no one will feel comfortable investing in any of our Historic Districts.

The City of Milwaukee needs to be faithful to, and be consistent with, the decades of our public policies that have created important protections for our historic architectural heritage. Doing so requires the City to insist that the developer investigate the re-use of these five historic buildings in deference to their presence in an Historic District.

The demonstrated demand for hotel rooms in the City of Milwaukee should empower the City to push for better urban design by requiring the developers to envision a project more like the Hotel Metro or the Marriott Residence Inn as well as those proposed for the Pabst Brewery and the Loyalty Building, another

East Side Commercial Historic District property. Additionally, even if the proposed development is redesigned, as I have suggested, no demolition of any part of these buildings should be allowed until the new development is completely designed, financed and ready to start construction otherwise we risk repeating the demolition mistake of the Gugler Litho/Jewish Vocational Services building at Broadway and Ogden.

Thank you for your attention to this letter and for maintaining our City's long commitment to historic preservation balanced with responsible development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "David Uihlein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large "D" and "U".

David V. Uihlein, Jr.