

## Elmer, Linda

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**From:** Cosecha Creative-Space <cosechacreativespace@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 31, 2020 3:56 PM  
**To:** Cosecha Creative-Space  
**Subject:** \*\*\*Postpone The Shepard Fairey Mural\*\*\*

Dear Historic Preservation Commission,

We are writing this letter to request that the Historic Preservation Commission postpone the approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the Shepard Fairey mural installation on the Railway Exchange Building for further community dialogue.

We believe that this alteration will not only have a significant impact on the core historic value that has been placed on this building and district, but also the current and future social and emotional experiences held within the community. We believe that the voices and perspectives of the community should be central to a mural of this scope and scale. As community members who are invested in the well-being of all of our City's artists and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, we hope this letter will encourage all who are involved to consider and uplift new and diverse perspectives, as well as the ways in which projects like this can be better facilitated, so that they are not harmful not only to the historic district, but to our communities, and city at large.

Historic Preservation:

We support consideration of murals and public art on historically designated buildings and in Milwaukee's significant historic districts. We feel, however, that the proposed Shepard Fairey "Voting Rights are Human Rights" mural is not compatible with the historic and architectural character of the building or district as outlined in the Historic Designation Study Report.

The mural in question is proposed to go on one of the tallest, if not the tallest, buildings in the East Side Commercial Historic District. This means it will affect many other structures in terms of visuals and sightlines. This district is notable for its "visual cohesiveness," meaning the visual aspect has been an important part of the historic designation from the start.

We also encourage members of the Historic Preservation Commission to consider these items outlined in the Commission's Stated Purpose and Intent:

- Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history.
- Safeguard the city's historic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in landmarks and historic districts.
- Foster civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past.

The Voting Rights are Human Rights image that was designed as a poster in February 2020 is based on a collaboration with a New York photographer, Steve Schapiro, who documented civil rights protests in the 1960s. While it carries a worthy message, this particular image is in no way specific to Milwaukee and does not reflect our city's "cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history". Although the HPC ordinance does not yet directly address murals and public art, guidelines outlined generally in the ordinance should be considered in this decision.

We realize that this is a privately owned building with private funds supporting the project, but facades of buildings are on display for the public to view. We would like to see an opportunity for shared participation and transparency throughout the decision making process, when it comes to our City's public art.

While the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) does not have to base its decision on anything other than preserving historic buildings/districts and upholding architectural character, we urge HPC to think about culturally responsive practices and competency, cultural equity, and long term community investment as well when making facilitating a very serious decision.

Culturally Responsive Practices and Competency, Cultural Equity, and Community Investment: Cultural Competency is defined as the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural Equity, as defined by Americans for the Arts “embodies the values, policies, and practices that ensure that all people—including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion—are represented in the development of arts policy; the support of artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.”

We believe the arts institutions involved in this project, Wallpapered City, Black Box Fund, Obey Giant and other partners, have shown a disregard for cultural competency and are promoting a project that is culturally inequitable.

If the Voting Rights are Human Rights image is supposed to be supportive of voting rights, particularly with respect to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), it seems incongruous that the development and consultation of this project lacks sufficient BIPOC leadership. This would not be okay under normal circumstances, but especially right now—when the Black Lives Matter movement has international momentum and is one of the largest social justice movements in our nation’s history, it feels particularly inappropriate. Given how active Milwaukee has been in support of Black Lives Matter, this project demonstrates an egregious disconnect between those planning the mural and our city’s present-day reality.

Shepard Fairey has a track record of plagiarism from street art to commercial work, as outlined here: <http://www.art-for-a-change.com/Obey/>. We specifically find his blatant plagiarism of works by BIPOC artists including Rupert Garcia and the Young Lords Party problematic and harmful.

The Barack Obama Hope poster put Fairey on the map for many of us. This image, however, was not commissioned by, nor ever endorsed by, the Obama Campaign. Additionally, this artwork resulted in a lawsuit between the Associated Press (AP) and Fairey over copyright infringement. Fairey destroyed evidence that would likely have proven that he based the poster on an AP photograph. He was sentenced to 300 hours of community service and a \$25,000 fine.

We find it troubling that our city’s arts institutions and funders would consider giving resources to a problematic white male artist who purports to represent BIPOC people, but has not reached out to Milwaukee’s BIPOC artists. We should be taking every opportunity to invest in local, and specifically BIPOC artists, especially during a pandemic that has made the already limited resources for artists even more scarce.

While we support bringing nationally and internationally recognized artists to create art with and for our city. We are against championing an artist such as Shepard Fairey, who has profited off of controversy - not to mention others' work. With a little research, and/or by hiring consultants knowledgeable in this field, the organizations supporting the Fairey mural would find there are many other important artists, particularly BIPOC artists, who are more relevant, represent the community they are making work about, and can do so authentically.

#### Actions

As our society faces the realities of systemic inequities and cultural dominance, we have the opportunity to create more equitable processes to address these issues.

Again, we ask that HPC consider postponing the approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the Shepard Fairey mural installation on the Railway Exchange Building to allow an opportunity for community dialogue.

In addition, we encourage stakeholders including Wallpapered City, Black Box Fund, and the Railway Exchange Building to instead consider the following actions:

- Acknowledge the problematic lack of cultural competency and inequity in the planned mural by Shepard Fairey on the Railway Exchange building.
- Support the creation of an inclusive public input structure and act on that public input. To date, there have not been any opportunities for this, nor has feedback been welcomed by the commission. It is unacceptable that the public was only made aware of this commission through an Urban Milwaukee article regarding the project's Certificate of Appropriateness.
- Use public art to positively impact important issues, such as voter rights, by engaging and empowering those who are most affected by those issues. Create intentional dialogue with artists, community members and local arts institutions to create public work that is by, for and from those most affected by a topic—making sure that the narratives that affect BIPOC communities are being told from their perspectives.
- Work with BIPOC artists and consultants to create a transparent, community feedback process for projects of this nature.

Because of the prominence and scale of the location of this installation, it is crucial that we as a community make the right decision about the process and resulting image.

Thank you,

1. Ellie Jackson
2. Erick Ledesma
3. Katie Avila Loughmiller
4. Caley Conway
5. Vanessa Parker
6. Kelsey Boyle
7. Gabriela Riveros
8. Irma Román
9. Alhaji Camara
10. Emily Oliver
11. Johanna Rose
12. Fatima Laster
13. Jeanette Arellano
14. Ellie Piper
15. Melissa Mursch
16. Judith Kagen
17. Kari Garon
18. Daniel Schuyler
19. Lina Chambers
20. Rosie Petry
21. Juan Miguel Martinez
22. Valaria Tatera
23. Celeste Contreras
24. Danielle Nabak
25. Julio Cordova
26. Maddy Riordan
27. Dennis Carl
28. Beth Haskovec
29. Rae Johnson
30. Anika Kowalik
31. Kelly Wagner
32. Caressa D. Givens
33. Nicolas Lampert
34. Angel Montoya

35. Anahí Sanchez
36. Katie Coldwell
37. Ciarra Wooten
38. LaNia Sproles
39. Kat Wodtke
40. Khadeja A Merenkov
41. Yessica Jimenez
42. Teena Wilder
43. Wendy Mesich
44. John Hamnett
45. Andrea Lira Landa
46. Jennifer Bastian
47. Andrew Koenig
48. Jake Riley
49. Yaniliz Rosario
50. Justin Otto
51. Adriana Rodríguez
52. Jenie Gao
53. Nabra Nelson
54. Alejandra Gonzalez
55. Gisela Ortega
56. Alexander Coddington
57. Tracy Olson
58. Darci Curwen-Garber
59. Jessica Schubkegel
60. Matthew Baran
61. Julio Cesar Gumeta Ramos
62. Itzel Hernandez
63. Dana Zurek
64. Malena Magnolia
65. Kaitlin Downs
66. Zoe Darling
67. Jamie Ziolkowski
68. Joenny Lopez
69. Jeanette Martin
70. Winnie Brooks
71. Raoul Deal
72. Anna Diantoni
73. Erik Kennedy
74. Kaitlyn Bjerk
75. Rachel Hausmann-Schall
76. Miguel Angel Sanchez
77. Brett Henzig
78. Kristi Secord
79. Eli Walker
80. Lillian Schley
81. Stephanie Baghai
82. Cinthia Tellez Silva
83. Ras Nsoroma
84. Joe Acri
85. Andrea Rodriguez
86. Ayla jensen
87. Nayeli Portillo
88. Harley Esposito
89. Abbey Pitchford
90. Chelsea Wait

91. Mary Braddock
92. Michael Podvin
93. Camila Flores
94. Lian markovich
95. Carrie O'Connor
96. Terry Schmerling
97. Nailah Johnson
98. Alvaro Saar Rios
99. Amanda Doolittle
100. Kaitlin Valli
101. Corinna D Moreno
102. Monica Miller
103. Stephanie Baghai
104. Sara caron
105. Alisha Klapps
106. Jack OGrady
107. Bonita Klein-Tasman
108. Mary Osmundsen
109. Pamela Sable
110. Juli Schultz
111. Zachary Ochoa
112. Adam Haggerty
113. Sarah Kennedy
114. Ashley Lee
115. Dana Dufek
116. Audrey Moore
117. Moira Tracey
118. Morgen Abramson
119. Matthew Presutti
120. Mackenna Krupa
121. Angie Treesea
122. Alex Bischmann
123. Olivia Dobbs
124. Tracee Johnson
125. Samantha Rausch
126. Tom Roberts
127. Leah Harris
128. Molly Rosenblum
129. Brian Lynch
130. Naomi Shersty

Erick "Ck" Ledesma

Pronouns: he/she/they

*Artistic Director and Co-Founder*

Cosecha Creative Space

#BlackLivesMatter

