

January 6, 2023

To the honorable Chair and committee members:

1100 S. 5th Street, Ste. 319
Milwaukee, WI 53204
P: 414.220.0530

The Milwaukee Preservation Alliance encourages the Committee to reject the proposed demolition of the historically significant building at 1101 W. Historic Mitchell St. While we appreciate the applicant's intention to spur economic growth and provide important services to the neighborhood as well as their efforts to nod to the district's historic character in new construction, the proposed demolition nevertheless sets an untenable precedent for historic districts within the city of Milwaukee. To allow the demolition would send an unfortunate message regarding the value and importance of properties determined through public process to "reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history" (320-21-1-a) and run counter to the purpose of the ordinance to "Safeguard the city's historic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in landmarks and historic districts" (320-21-1-b).

As a contributing structure to a nationally registered historic district and an important component of a locally designated historic district that has been determined by the Historic Preservation Commission not to meet the established criteria for demolition, landfilling this unique building would set a dangerous precedent that would make it easier for other important historic places throughout Milwaukee to be erased. To demolish the property would be to neglect our responsibility as stewards of the stories of the past. The Grand building can be integrated into a vibrant future rather than supplanted by it.

This unique Art Deco building, an important early community hub in this significant commercial district, has been a longtime member of the community and can be a valuable part of its future. Both/and, win-win preservation options exist. As we have seen through the nationally recognized restoration of the 1869 Old Main building at the Milwaukee Soldiers Home, which had sat vacant for 30 years with a collapsed roof and was restored as housing for homeless veterans, preservation can be accomplished in a way that honors the past and meets current needs. Federal and State Historic Tax Credits would be available for 1101 to assist with the costs. Further, design choices such as construction on top of or behind the current structure or on one of the many underutilized parking lots in the district would allow the requested added density to be achieved without demolition. Relocating the development would put to a higher and better use largely vacant surface parking in a district with 1000% more parking than the next highest city shopping district and provide the City with the opportunity to gain tax revenue

from multiple sites. The use of the skilled labor necessary for preservation work also supports local jobs in a way that demolition does not.

Therefore, we encourage the committee to reject the proposed demolition. This significant building can become an even more valuable asset to the community by being brought back to life with a new purpose, continuing to tell the stories of immigrant communities of the past, invigorating the present, and providing a springboard for the future by being integrated into new development rather than needlessly sent to the landfill.

Thank you for your hard work on behalf of the people and places of Milwaukee.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Ebersole
Executive Director
Milwaukee Preservation Alliance

Zachary Peterson
Board of Directors
Milwaukee Preservation Alliance