

June 7, 2021

To the Honorable Chair and Commissioners,

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We are grateful to Ald. Bauman for bringing this important file to the Council's attention.

The City's ARPA funds represent an historic opportunity for Milwaukee to invest in affordable housing in underserved neighborhoods and protect our environment by investing in the restoration rather than the demolition of the hundreds of City-owned homes currently on the raze and foreclosure list.

Vacancy does not equal blight, and a commitment to restoring these homes would be a strong investment in underserved neighborhoods that would create rather than eliminate desperately needed affordable housing, returning properties to productive use and the tax rolls rather than reducing them to empty lots, and support more local skilled labor than mechanical demolition.

The historically high current cost of lumber makes creating affordable housing through new construction even more impossible than usual. Existing homes, however, are often built of irreplaceable old growth lumber. As the City considers its developing citywide affordable housing plan and use of ARPA funds, it would be valuable not to demolish the Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing that older homes represent so efforts can focus on restoring these homes, making neighborhoods safer while bringing vacant homes back to life.

Investing in the restoration of vacant properties is also the environmentally friendly choice. Renovating an older home vs. tearing down the same structure and replacing it with a new building has the equivalent effect of removing 93 cars from the road for an entire year. The winners of this year's highest international architecture award have said "Demolishing is a decision of easiness and short term. It is a waste of many things — a waste of energy, a waste of material, and a waste of history. Moreover, it has a very negative social impact. It is an act of violence."

I urge the City to move away from a question of 'why should this be saved?' to one of 'why should we throw this away?' We have an opportunity to change the narrative, to not throw away affordable housing but restore it, invest in neighborhoods in need, and protect the environment. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Ebersole  
Executive Director  
Milwaukee Preservation Alliance