From:	Docomomo Chicago
To:	Elmer, Linda
Subject:	Forest Home Library temporary designation support
Date:	Saturday, October 31, 2020 7:27:19 AM

Dear Chair Pelz and members of the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission,

Docomomo Chicago/Midwest strongly supports temporary historic designation of the Forest Home Library. The building is a significant reminder of the City's post-WWII library expansion campaign, and it is a strikingly well-preserved example of Modern design that remains as relevant today as when the American Institute of Architects praised it at its opening in 1966.

Forest Home Library exemplifies the post-WWII cultural and historic heritage of the Milwaukee Public Library system. As the City of Milwaukee exploded in size and population following WWII, the library system constructed seven new branch libraries. Of these, Forest Home was the most structurally, programmatically, and aesthetically innovative. Forest Home Library illustrates the Milwaukee Public Library's response to changing midcentury users and programmatic needs and its commitment to providing innovative and attractive buildings.

The library is an outstanding local example of the Modern style of architecture. It illustrates some of the best character-defining elements associated with the style, including the use of precast concrete panels, ribbon windows, and an interior containing open and adaptable "universal space." Forest Home Library also represents one of the earliest local uses of Corten weathering steel. During construction, the architects obtained a special exemption from the Wisconsin Industrial Commission in order to allow the exterior steel to remain unpainted in order to achieve its intended patina.

Forest Home Library was designed by the prominent Milwaukee architectural firm of Van Grossman, Burroughs, and Van Lanen, with Robert Van Lanen acting as lead designer for the project. Van Lanen also designed Fulton Junior High School on N. 1st St. (later Malcom X Academy). The firm also designed two other branch libraries: Villard Avenue (for sale; demolition likely), and Mill Road (no longer in use).

Forest Home Library may be smaller than some of Milwaukee's other Modernist gems such as the War Memorial or the Mitchell Park Domes, but it is no less of a masterpiece. We urge the Commission to grant temporary historic designation to the Forest Home Library to allow Historic Preservation staff and commissioners more time to evaluate the library's architectural significance as one of Milwaukee's most distinctive high-style Modernist buildings.

Sincerely,

Craig Brandt
Chair, Advocacy Committee

Docomomo US/Chicago
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