



October 29, 2020

Historic Preservation Commission
Zeidler Municipal Building
841 N. Broadway, Room B-1
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Re: 1432 W. Forest Home Avenue, Owner Objection to Historic Designation

The City of Milwaukee owns the former Forest Home Library at 1432 W. Forest Home Avenue for the benefit of the Milwaukee Public Library (MPL) Board. Under state statute 43.58 (1) the MPL Board has charge, control and custody over library lands and buildings.

On October 15, 2020, a Petition for Temporary Historic Designation of 1432 W. Forest Home Avenue was filed under MCO 320-21 (Council File # 200863). MPL (owner) respectfully objects to the Petition, and to historic designation, whether permanent or temporary, of 1432 W. Forest Home.

MPL moved library operations from 1432 W. Forest Home Avenue to the Historic Hills Building (Lions Store) at 906 W. Historic Mitchell Street in 2017 **(a)** to better serve the community, and **(b)** to promote historic renovation and revitalization of the historic Hills Building (\$20M project with state and federal historic tax credits).

The MPL's move to aid historic redevelopment of the Hills Building resulted in vacancy of the former Forest Home Library. Vacant buildings have a blighting influence on the neighborhood, and vacant and boarded buildings, especially in Wisconsin, tend to deteriorate. A recent site visit in October 2020 showed signs of drug use and vandalism on site.

The former Forest Home Library building, built in 1966, is an expensive building to operate (large heating bills due to its design), an to keep secure, and to occupy and rehab due to deferred maintenance issues such as HVAC, roof, and significant asbestos.

After MPL Board designation of surplus status of the former library building on September 26, 2017, the Department of City Development, acting as the agent for MPL, tried to sell the former library building on the open market in a way so that the building could be rehabbed and maintained. However, no buyer emerged who was able to rehab and occupy in an economically feasible and responsible manner.

- City's Request for Proposal (RFP) process in 2018 resulted in only one buyer, Voces de la Frontera. That deal did not materialize due to expense and economic infeasibility.
- City's re-listing in 2019 resulted in only one buyer, HK Gill Properties. That deal too failed to materialize.
- City re-listed again in late 2019, and ICAP emerged. Again, MPL wanted to see the building rehabbed, but ICAP's due diligence, especially given asbestos (human health hazard), showed that it was economically infeasible to rehab. ICAP altered its plans to a project of demolishing the existing building and new construction of a \$5.4M building to be leased, long-term, to Children's Hospital, for operation of a clinic serving the community.

MPL Board approved sale to ICAP on September 22, 2020, understanding that demolition was part of the project and sale. Common Council File # 200856 was introduced on October 13, 2020, and the owner's (MPL/City) proposed sale to ICAP will be heard at ZND on November 17, 2020.

Please consider the following when considering the designation of the former Forest Home Library:

- HPC has the authority to review potentially historically significant buildings in the City and to recommend to the Common Council historic designation (320-21, sub 8, subs a through e). During MPL ownership, no such HPC recommendation has been made to the Council.
- City buildings are exempt from 320-21 if authorized by the Council (sub 2 sub b). The Common Council has the sale file before it.
- If historic designation is approved, and demo/raze is prohibited, the ICAP/clinic deal will not materialize. The former Forest Home Library, already vacant due to MPL's move to the Historic Hills Building, will remain vacant and boarded, and a blight on the community. History has shown that former library buildings are not easy to sell on the open market for rehabilitation. One can expect vacancy and degradation of the building to continue, meaning eventual razing is likely. Also, the tax base will suffer because the building will not be returned to the tax rolls as it would under the ICAP deal. Consequently, allowing the sale to ICAP, with its demolition and build plan for a new clinic, will result in positive public benefits and promote general public welfare.

MPL wishes to convey the former Forest Home Library property so that the property may be revitalized, be put back on the tax rolls, and provide important clinic services to the neighborhood. Here, foreseeable public harm exists if the 1432 building sits vacant, whereas numerous public benefits may be attained by conveying to ICAP for the clinic project.

Owner objects to historic status, and asks the HPC to deny the petition. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Joan Johnson
City Librarian
Milwaukee Public Library

Cc: Jim Owczarski, City Clerk
Carlen Hatala, City Clerk's Office



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Dear Commissioners,

The Forest Home Branch Library building served the Milwaukee Public Library's (MPL) needs for several decades. However, as the needs of our patrons continued to evolve, it became clear that the facility was no longer suitable for MPL.

The interior design was not flexible enough to expand the number of computers for patrons, or provide a proper place for our after school tutoring programs. The community room was far too small and separated from the rest of the library - making it unusable dead space unless a program was occurring. The exposed steel beams, a central design element, made it nearly impossible to control the climate in the building during both summer and winter. In short, the building no longer met our needs.

MPL teamed up with a developer in a remarkable public-private partnership to obtain Historic Preservation Tax Credits and move the library to another historically and architecturally significant building in the neighborhood. With much fanfare, we moved into the Historic Mitchell Street Branch Library at 906 West Historic Mitchell Street (the former Hills Building) in 2017. The space is a dynamic anchor institution in one of Milwaukee's most dynamic neighborhoods, and is larger, more flexible, and utilizes the latest technology for library services, programs and building operations.

There is an opportunity now to let the Forest Home property continue to serve the community with a new building on the site that will serve area children and families with a desperately needed Children's Wisconsin health clinic. It is hard to imagine a better use for the property with its close proximity to the densely packed neighborhood housing the youngest population in the City of Milwaukee, particularly during a critical moment of socioeconomic insecurity and a glaring disparity in health care outcomes. We love our old buildings, but we love our children more.

Lastly, it is worth reminding the Committee that the library uses any proceeds from the sale of its properties to re-invest in special community centered projects that would never be possible with our limited city operating funds. Library funding is threatened every year due to cuts in the city budget. We can't afford to turn our backs on that reality and let this building continue to sit vacant for another two years.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michele Bria". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michele" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bria".

Dr. Michele Bria
Board President
Milwaukee Public Library
Board of Trustees

Cc: Jim Owczarski, City Clerk
Carlen Hatala,