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Statement on Forest Home Library

City of Milwaukee, ZND Hearing

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My name is Michael Carriere and I am an associate professor at the Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE), where I direct the MSOE University Scholars Honors Program. I hold a Ph.D. in American history from the University of Chicago, with an emphasis on the history of the urban built environment.

For the past ten years I have been working on a project called *The City Creative: The Rise of Urban Placemaking in Contemporary America*. This book, which will be published by the University of Chicago Press in February 2021, takes a close look at spaces in American cities that work, places that highlight the important histories of communities while continuing to serve the needs of present-day residents. I strongly believe that the Forest Home Library is such a site.

The building itself – vacant for just three years – is in excellent condition. Its striking modernist design suggests that this is an important space. The open-concept design of the building's interior could be utilized in a host of ways, while the building's exterior spaces provide much-needed green space for one of the city's most densely populated neighborhoods (the proposed new building, from what I hear, will have a bigger footprint than the original structure).

As I'm sure others will note, there are profound environmental costs to tearing down such a building. But one should not underestimate the damage done to a community's social fabric through demolition. The Forest Home Library has been a part of this community's landscape for close to 55 years. It is more than an example of modernist architecture in Milwaukee (though this is an important point to note, as there is evidence that historic preservation can drive economic growth); it is a space that has served residents well for generations. A functioning neighborhood features a mix of building types, from a variety of eras. Yes, the Forest Home Library is a reminder of an era when we used design to suggest the importance of places like public libraries. But it is also remains a functional space that could serve the needs of the community in a myriad of ways. Don't tear it down.