

March 7, 2022

To the honorable Chair and Commissioners:

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The Milwaukee Preservation Alliance supports temporary historic designation of the original Columbia Hospital at 2015-2025 E. Newport Ave. We believe the building may have significance under three criteria. These include e-1 “exemplification and development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the city” for its status as a research center at the forefront of medical sciences in Milwaukee, e-5 “embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen” as an intact example of an institutional Georgian Revival design and perhaps the last remaining example in Milwaukee of 19th century hospital design ideals, and e-6 “identification as the work of an artist, architect, craftsman or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the city” for its association with master architects Schmidt, Garden & Martin and Eschweiler & Eschweiler.

Focusing strictly on the historic significance of the property under the Commission’s purview, there can be little doubt that the original Columbia Hospital meets the criteria for temporary designation and warrants further study for permanent designation. Architecturally, the building is a standout example of Georgian Revival design that retains exterior integrity. It is also a rare example of a property with numerous additions within the period of significance which maintain many characteristics of the original and do not diminish the property’s integrity. Many of these additions are the work of Eschweiler & Eschweiler, among the most celebrated Milwaukee architects of the 20th century. Many of the Eschweilers’ buildings are already designated for their historic significance.

The original 1919 construction was designed by a firm including Richard E. Schmidt, an expert in hospital design with a distinct design ideal who authored publications on the subject espousing his views and featuring Columbia Hospital. This design follows the “pavilion plan” popularized by Florence Nightingale and others in the 19th century. This double-loaded corridor plan with endcap bay windows was meant to constantly circulate fresh air, which was thought to be beneficial in preventing the spread of contagious disease. Importantly, this may be the last remaining example of this influential hospital design in Milwaukee.

Finally, Columbia Hospital was a medical pioneer in Milwaukee, serving as the first hospital in the city to feature a complete laboratory, among other innovations, and playing host to many prominent, groundbreaking physicians over the years.

For these reasons, we believe the original Columbia Hospital deserves the further exploration that temporary historic designation would provide and urge the Commission to grant the designation.

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

Respectfully,

Jeremy Ebersole
Executive Director
Milwaukee Preservation Alliance