

Elmer, Linda

From: Gabriela Riveros <gabriela.riveros@kohls.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 29, 2020 2:13 PM
To: Elmer, Linda
Subject: Halting Shepard Fairey mural installation

Dear Historic Preservation Commission,

I am Gabriela Riveros, a local artist born and raised in Milwaukee. I am sending you a drafted letter created by other local artists that I am in support in. Please halt this project and redirect funds to hire Milwaukee artists of color to create murals about our life and experiences, especially since we are the most disenfranchised when it comes to voting. Murals are supposed to be an ode to the community, not a tourist trap. Shepard Fairey has been called out on capitalizing on plagiarized designs from artists activists, and I am not ok with him representing our community's fight for the right to vote.

Milwaukee has such a strong legacy of art activism and so many dedicated local artists who are passionate about their craft. If you have intentions to better our city, see it all the way through, please uplift Milwaukee in all ways and hire Milwaukee artists to the project, not a celebrity who is not rooted here.

We are writing this letter to request the Historic Preservation Commission postpone approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the Shepard Fairey mural installation on the Railway Exchange Building for further community dialogue. We feel that this alteration will impact the core historic value that has been placed on this building and district but also because we feel that community input should be central to a mural of this scope and scale. As community members who are invested in the well-being of all of our City's artists and BIPOC communities, we hope this letter will encourage all involved to consider new and diverse perspectives, as well as the ways in which projects like this are harmful not only to the historic district, but to our communities and city at large.

Historic Preservation

We support consideration of murals and public art on historically designated buildings and in Milwaukee's significant historic districts. We feel, however, that the proposed Shepard Fairey *Voting Rights are Human Rights* mural is not compatible with the historic and architectural character of the building or district as outlined in the *Historic Designation Study Report*.

The mural in question is proposed to go on one of the tallest, if not the tallest, buildings in the *East Side Commercial Historic District*. This means it will affect many other structures in terms of visuals and sightlines. This district is notable for its "visual cohesiveness," meaning the visual aspect has been an important part of the historic designation from the start.

We also encourage members of the Historic Preservation Commission to consider these items outlined in the Commission's Stated Purpose and Intent:

- ● Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history.
- ● Safeguard the city's historic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in landmarks and historic districts.
- ● Foster civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past.

Actions

As our society faces the realities of systemic inequities and cultural dominance, we have the opportunity to create more equitable processes to address these issues.

We're asking that the Historic Preservation Commission deny this Certificate of Appropriateness.

In addition, we encourage stakeholders including Wallpapered City, Black Box Fund, and the Railway Exchange Building to instead consider the following actions:

1. Acknowledge the problematic lack of cultural competency and inequity in the planned mural by Shepard Fairey on the Railway Exchange building.
2. Support the creation of an inclusive public input structure and act on that public input. To date, there have not been any opportunities for this, nor has feedback been welcomed by the commission. It is unacceptable that the public was only made aware of this commission through an *Urban Milwaukee* article regarding the project's Certificate of Appropriateness.
3. Use public art to positively impact important issues, such as voter rights, by engaging and empowering those who are most affected by those issues. Create intentional dialogue with artists, community members and local arts institutions to create public work that is by, for and from those most affected by a topic—making sure that the narratives that affect BIPOC communities are being told from their perspectives.
4. Work with BIPOC artists and consultants to create a transparent, community feedback process for projects of this nature.

Because of the prominence and scale of the location of this installation, it is crucial that we as a community make the right decision about the process and resulting image.

Thank you,

Ellie Jackson
Erick Ledesma
Katie Avila Loughmiller Vanessa Parker

Gabriela Riveros

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Gabriela Riveros
Advanced Artist

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