

Historic Preservation Commission
Office of the City Clerk
841 N Broadway, Rm B-1
Milwaukee, WI 53202

RE: Temporary Historic Designation Application (file #200863)
1432 W. Forest Home Ave., Milwaukee, WI

Dear Commissioners,

Our companies have been working with the Milwaukee Public Library and the Department of Community Development on the subject property since November 2019. Initially, we proceeded with the intention of reusing the existing building. Admittedly, this goal of reuse was not for any reasons related to the history of the building, but rather that all redevelopment projects should consider the reuse of existing structures as a first option. After over six months of design and construction exploration, it was determined that this building is simply not designed for reuse.

We agree with the Application for Temporary Historical Designation that this building is interesting and pleasing to the eye. The structure shows good massing and is expressive in its structural nature. The designers did a good job of conforming a rectilinear building to a trapezoidal shape. However, this building functions better as a pavilion than a building. This structure is not designed for the climate in Wisconsin.

The building appears to have been designed to code minimum for its time and does not meet current energy codes. The building envelope is glazing supported by a steel structural back up. Where glazing is not utilized in the façade, you can find precast concrete with no insulation. As currently designed, this building has an average r-value of less than 2 for the exterior walls with materials that are highly conducive to thermal bridging. To correct these issues would require all of the glazing to be removed and replaced with thermally broken storefront, with a substantial window system due to the amount of glazing. This would drastically change the look of the buildings glazing rhythm by reducing the glazing width substantially. The through wall structural steel would need to be wrapped on both the inside and out and insulated as much as possible creating awkward conditions and further interrupting the glazing rhythm. The precast panels would need to be furred out on the interior and continued through the window system, again drastically changing the exterior look of the building. Not to mention these precast panels, after being furred out for insulation purposes, do not allow enough head room to be considered an occupiable space inside the building. The floor slab was poured after the steel was in place and continues to the outside wall of the building creating a floor slab that is both inside and outside. Finally, the roof of the building does not have nearly enough insulation to accommodate the current code and is designed with metal decking running from the interior to the exterior without any break. To bring this part of the building up to current requirements would mean cutting the metal deck and adding new steel supports to provide a thermal break as well as adding insulation to such an extent that the center clerestory of the building would be covered with insulation. These observations are mentioned to show that (i) the existing structure was not designed for our climate and (ii) any attempt to bring this structure up to current energy code would require a complete rework of the entire esthetic of the current building.

With respect to the historical nature of the building, the Application for Temporary Historical Designation fails to provide proof that this building has “historical, architectural and cultural significance” pursuant to s. 320-21 of Milwaukee’s Code of Ordinances. Specifically, below is a summary of the attributes listed to meet the requirement:

3 e-1:	The existing building was purpose-built for use as a library. It could be argued that a library added to the cultural heritage of Milwaukee. However, the building itself was not the reason for this cultural influence. This is confirmed by the fact that the Milwaukee Public Library left the location and approved the sale of the property with knowledge that it would be demolished.
3 e-2:	No historical event occurred at this location
3 e-3:	The Application spends time discussing Frederick von Grossman, who does not appear to be the architect of record for the building. It is believed van Lanen was the architect of record for the building. Additionally, von Grossman appears to only have spent a short amount of time at the architectural firm von Grossman, Burroughs & Van Lanen. By 1969, the Milwaukee architectural firm had already shortened its name to Burroughs & Van Lanen.
3 e-4:	No portrayal of the environment of a group of people by architectural style
3 e-5:	This building is an example of mid-century modern design, which is admittedly unique in Milwaukee. However, with its issues related to thermal bridging, this building is an example of how NOT to design a structure for Milwaukee’s climate.
3 e-6:	See comment to 3 e-3.
3 e-7:	The Application focuses on the use of COR-TEN steel. The use of COR-TEN steel during the late 50’s and early 60’s was quite prevalent due to U.S. Steel’s marketing of the product during that time. The Application pointed out that COR-TEN steel at the time was significantly more expensive than conventional steel framing. That is in fact still true today with COR-TEN steel costing 50%-100% more than common steel grades. The material is still uncommon to find on buildings today because of the material’s inherent downfalls. Most members of the general public view it to be a steel member that is failing instead of naturally aging. The constant rusting of the product stains concrete and glazing, and depending on its type and/or manufacturing standards the material can continue to rust until it is completely unstable and needs to be replaced. This building is not an example of cutting-edge architecture, it is an example of following the design and material trend of other designers of the time.
3 e-8:	No relationship to other surrounding areas.
3 e-9:	No unique location
3 e-10:	No association with pre-European settlement

As shown above, the structure located at 1432 W Forest Home does not meet a level of historical significance required for designation. We respectfully request that the Historic Preservation Commission deny the request for temporary historical designation of the structure.

Sincerely,

Brian Adamson- ICAP Development

Steve Petitt- Groth Design Group