



**March 3rd, 2025**

Members of the Historic Preservation Commission,

I am writing on behalf of the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects, or WiscoNOMA, in support of historic landmark designation for the Central City Complex on Milwaukee's near north side. WiscoNOMA is a 501(c)(6) professional service organization dedicated to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the architectural profession across Wisconsin through advocacy, mentorship, and community engagement. We seek to improve representation of minorities at all levels of the design profession through a wide variety of programs aimed at youth engagement, educational support, emerging professional development, licensing assistance, community-based design justice, and recognition of exemplary minority architects past and present.

"We are going to have to have people as committed to doing the right thing, to inclusiveness, as we have in the past to exclusiveness."

—Whitney Young, Jr.

June 1968

In the year civil rights leader Whitney Young made the above statement to the AIA, Black architects made up 0.5% of all registered architects in the United States. In the 57 years since that speech, the number has only climbed up to 2%, even though African Americans make up nearly 14% of the population. More humans have been to orbit (610) than African-American women who have become licensed architects. There are currently just 11 Black registered architects in the state of Wisconsin. If the profession of architecture is to be relevant for everyone in society, it must look like our society. To achieve this, we must not only look toward the future, but to the past as well.

Despite being small in number, Black architects in Wisconsin have been great in stature and accomplishments. The very first of these, Alonzo Robinson Jr., designed over 100 buildings over four decades in practice. Robinson served his country and his community throughout his life—as an enlisted man in the United States Navy during World War II, as a naval architect after receiving his degree from Howard University, as a designer with Milwaukee's City Bureau of Bridges and Buildings, as a partner with the firm DeQuardo Robinson and Crouch, as the first municipal architect for the City of Milwaukee, and as an educator of future architects at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Nonetheless, Robinson's achievements are little-known, even within the small community of Wisconsin architects. This is because the climate of racism during his career kept his name off of many of the projects Robinson designed.

Current and future Black design professionals need to see the pioneers that came before them being celebrated and held aloft if they are to feel that there is a successful, hopeful future ahead. Robinson's pioneering and community-centered work is being uncovered through painstaking research by historians like Justin Miller at UW-Milwaukee, through the support of the African American Cultural Heritage Fund. While Robinson's work is being discovered anew, unfortunately it is also being lost. As much as a third of Robinson's built designs have already been demolished. We at WiscoNOMA advise and exhort the Commission to provide historic landmark designation for the Central City Complex as a step toward preserving this important site and recognizing the contributions of one of Milwaukee's best citizens as an inspiration to future generations of architects.

Sincerely,

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Vice President  
WiscoNOMA