

MPA

MILWAUKEE PRESERVATION ALLIANCE
P.O. Box 510642 Milwaukee, WI 53203-0111

Ann Pieper Eisenbrown, Chair
Historic Preservation Commission
City Hall, City of Milwaukee
200 East Wells Street, Room 205
Milwaukee, WI 53202

November 12, 2010

RE: Certificate of Appropriateness requesting the demolition of the buildings at 319-323 and 327 East Wisconsin Avenue and at 625, 627, and 629-631 North Milwaukee Street.

Dear Historic Preservation Commissioners:

The focus of the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance is to promote stewardship of Milwaukee's historic built heritage and promote awareness of its historic, cultural and economic value, strengthen Milwaukee's neighborhoods by preserving and promoting their unique cultural spaces and architectural assets, and to demonstrate the link between historic preservation and viable economic development. Accordingly, we are writing to express our strong opposition to the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) requesting the demolition of the buildings at 319-323 and 327 East Wisconsin Avenue and at 625, 627, and 629-631 North Milwaukee Street. We believe the COA request should be denied based on the historic significance of these buildings as a part of the East Side Commercial Historic District as well as policies and strategies established in the Department of City Development's Comprehensive Plan for Downtown updated in October 2010. In light of the recent Preservation award presented to the City of Milwaukee for the restoration of City Hall from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, razing these buildings would be a grave disservice to the national reputation of Milwaukee's historic downtown.

The Common Council, in 1987, passed resolution 87-0085, approving the local historic designation of the East Side Commercial Historic District. The study report states that the significance of this district is, in part, that the District contains an architecturally and historically significant collection of commercial buildings and that the district illustrates Milwaukee's commercial development from the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the century. The Common Council resolution also addresses considerations for demolition, stating first that demolition is not encouraged and that it is generally not permissible. One of the considerations for demolition is whether the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance, and has a positive effect on other buildings in the district. The buildings proposed for demolition unquestionably contribute to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and therefore, by Common Council resolution, should not be razed.

The Downtown Plan conceptualizes East Wisconsin Avenue as the spine of downtown with the potential to serve as a connection between other successfully revitalized historic districts that have maintained their comfortable, human-scale pedestrian environment promoting foot traffic, store-front browsing, shopping and entertainment. The proposed demolition of these historic structures in the 300 block of East Wisconsin Avenue and the 600 block of North Milwaukee Street would disrupt the streetscape continuity which largely consists of historic structures from the nineteenth century and would interrupt the visual

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connection between other historic districts such as the Third Ward and the 700 block of North Milwaukee Street. Regarding landmarks and historic or iconic buildings, the Downtown Plan states:

Downtown Milwaukee has numerous historic or historic-quality buildings. Well executed restorations have sparked new life for a number of these buildings. While some buildings retained their original uses others have found new ones when former uses became obsolete. Locally designated contributing historic buildings should be retained and redeveloped in accordance with local preservation requirements.

The revitalization of the East Side Commercial Historic District is a catalytic project that will inspire a confidence and commitment leading to additional investment and improvement in the surrounding area boldly creating and reinforcing Downtown's image, amenities, and a sense of place, and accomplish these things in a manner that furthers Downtown's attractiveness and overall development goals. While we are in favor of redeveloping downtown, razing these contributing buildings would not only destroy some of Milwaukee's historic architectural heritage forever, but will also leave a disconnect in the sense of place that is uniquely Milwaukee.

Sincerely,

Milwaukee Preservation Alliance Board

Dawn McCarthy, President
Geoff Grohowski, Treasurer
Joe Bova
Megan Daniels
Denise Hice
Ali Kopyt