



Feb 9, 2026

Re: Opposition to Proposed Permanent Historic Designation – Brady & Farwell Historic District (CCF 251231)

Honorable Members of the Common Council:

I write as the owner of the four properties proposed for permanent designation as the Brady & Farwell Historic District (the “Proposed District”). I acquired these properties on September 16, 2025. I respectfully urge the Common Council to deny the proposed designation.

At the outset, I ask the Council to apply the governing legal standard in Chapter 320, Subchapter 3, § 320-21-9(e), which requires that:

“The common council shall balance the public interest in the preservation of the structure, site or district that is the subject of the recommendation and the interest of the owner or owners in using the property for his, her or their purposes.”

That balancing obligation is not a formality—it is the heart of the Council’s responsibility. Historic designation is a permanent regulatory burden that imposes strict exterior controls and transfers substantial decision-making from the owner to the government through discretionary approvals that can be unpredictable, time-consuming, and expensive. Those extraordinary restrictions must be reserved for properties that truly preserve historic character and integrity, and where the statutory criteria are actually satisfied.

Here, the City’s own Study Report confirms why the Proposed District does not meet the ordinance standards and why the Council’s balancing duty compels denial.

I. The Proposed District Does Not Meet the Required Criteria Because the Buildings Do Not Retain the Level of Historic Integrity Necessary for District Designation.

The Study Report proposes designation based on criteria f-3, f-5, f-6, and f-9 under § 320-21(3). But the report’s detailed descriptions show that what the public sees today is not an intact historic enclave; rather, it is a cluster of heavily altered structures lacking cohesive historic district fabric.

As summarized in the attached outline, if major alterations, relocations, or later additions dominate what the public sees, designation is not appropriate—and that is exactly what the record reflects here.

II. The Corner “Anchor” Structure at 1700–1702 N. Farwell Is Dominated by a Non-Historic Commercial Addition and Modern Features.

F STREET

The Study Report acknowledges a 1950 one-story brick addition at the corner of Brady and Farwell that sits up to the property line, replacing the original setback and making the addition the primary streetscape presence. The report further describes metal frame window openings, modern entries with awnings, a parapet cap/railing, and other modernized features on the addition. It also documents a modern sliding door, modern commercial windows and a door, and modern replacement doors on an upper balcony.

In other words, the corner presence the public actually sees is not a nineteenth-century residence; it is a mid-century commercial block and associated modern alterations that obscure and diminish the original Queen Anne massing and historic character.

The Study Report attempts to minimize this by suggesting the 1950 addition “does not detract” and “could be removed” someday. But the Council must decide designation on the property as it exists, not on a hypothetical future restoration project that no one is obligated to undertake.

III. The Vallat Houses at 1708 N. Farwell and 1714–1716 N. Farwell Have Visible Incompatible Alterations Undermining a “Paired” Historic District Claim.

The Study Report notes that one visible window in the 1714–1716 structure has been infilled with glass block—precisely the kind of incompatible change that preservation standards discourage because it disrupts historic fenestration and materials. The report also documents modern porches on portions of these structures, further confirming alterations that compromise integrity and consistency—especially important where the City’s theory rests on these being a cohesive “paired” set.

A historic district is not created simply by proximity. District designation presupposes a coherent, intact historic character visible in the built environment—not a collection of structures in varying conditions with modern interventions and incompatibilities.

IV. The Oliver House’s Relocation and Subsequent Alterations Break the Historic “Setting” and Weaken the District Narrative.

The Study Report confirms the Joseph B. Oliver House was built on Prospect Avenue and later moved to its present site in 1892. The report also documents material changes over time, including porch modification and a major reconstruction in 1980, as well as other additions and alterations. Relocation and substantial later modifications directly undermine the continuity of setting and the authenticity of what is being preserved as part of a purported district.

V. The Study Report’s Claimed “Associations” Do Not Justify Imposing Permanent Restrictions Where Physical Integrity Is Compromised.

Criterion f-3 is premised in part on association with the Schenuit family and the Schenuit Conservatory of Music at 1700 N. Farwell. But the Study Report itself notes that the conservatory outgrew the residence and relocated to the Alhambra Theater. Whatever lasting significance exists is tied to later locations and performances—not to an altered corner property now dominated by a non-historic commercial addition.

F STREET

Similarly, while the report identifies notable architects and styles (criteria f-5 and f-6), those criteria still require that the relevant qualities are legibly present in the buildings as experienced today, not overwhelmed by later storefront construction, modern fenestration changes, reconstructed porches, and other alterations.

VI. The Council's Required Balancing Strongly Favors Denial.

The Council must give equal weight to “the interest of the owner...in using the property for his, her or their purposes.” The properties were purchased on September 15, 2025, without designation. I did not apply for the designation, and I oppose it. Permanent designation would restrict my ability to alter, improve, redevelop, and adapt the properties to a changing market—and would impose a continuing approval regime that is discretionary, unpredictable, time-consuming, and expensive.

The public may broadly value preservation in the abstract, but the financial and operational burden of that policy choice would be borne almost entirely by a single owner—effectively forcing the owner to subsidize a perceived public benefit. This is precisely why § 320-21-9(e) requires true balancing, and why designation should not proceed unless the criteria are clearly met and the integrity is intact.

Unusual Fact Pattern Surrounding This Application

Beyond the legal and architectural deficiencies outlined above, the Council should be aware of the unusual circumstances surrounding the filing of this application, which I present here as a factual matter for the Council's independent evaluation.

Under the current ordinance, any person may nominate another person's property for permanent historic designation by submitting a \$25.00 application, thereby initiating a process that can impose significant, permanent obligations and costs on the property owner. In this case, the application was filed by an individual I have never met. The applicant did not appear at either the Historic Preservation Committee hearing or the Zoning, Neighborhoods & Development Committee hearing to support his own application.

During the DNZ hearing, however, Alderman Bob Bauman—who sits on both the HPC and the DNZ—disclosed that he has known the applicant personally for approximately 50 years. When I noted the applicant's absence from both hearings as a factual observation, Alderman Bauman characterized the statement as “disparaging.”

The following facts are undisputed and part of the public record:

1. The application was filed shortly after my acquisition of the properties was reported in local media.
2. Alderman Bauman sits on both committees that reviewed and advanced this designation.
3. The applicant appeared at neither hearing to advocate for the designation he initiated.

F STREET

4. The properties existed for over 100 years without any nomination for historic designation.
5. Alderwoman Coggs, while abstaining from the DNZ vote, raised concerns on the record about whether the historic preservation process was being weaponized against property owners.

I present these facts without characterization and ask the Council to draw its own conclusions about whether this process has been conducted in a manner consistent with the fair and impartial administration of Chapter 320.

Conclusion

For all of these reasons, I respectfully request that the Common Council deny the proposed resolution granting permanent historic designation to the Brady & Farwell Historic District. The record demonstrates significant alterations, loss of historic integrity in key public-facing conditions, lack of cohesive district fabric, and a disproportionate burden on the owner that § 320-21-9(e) requires the Council to weigh heavily.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Lurie', with a stylized, cursive script.

Scott Lurie
Principal