

December 11, 2020

Chairman Perez and members of the committee,

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On behalf of the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance, **I strongly urge your support of the HPC's unanimous recommendation for permanent historic designation of the Forest Home Library building.** The end goal of historic preservation is to work collaboratively with municipalities, property owners, and the community to develop win-win solutions that balance the economic, environmental, and cultural value of the existing built environment with thoughtful new development. In the case of the Forest Home Library, **we have just such a win-win solution available.**

From the HPC's unanimous vote, to the State Historic Preservation Office's determination of eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, to the letters of support you received from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Docomomo-US, **experts at the local, state, and national level are watching Milwaukee and believe this building is significant** and deserving of designation. DCD also recognized this significance by including on the listing sheet for the building an explicit Buyer Development Obligation to "preserve existing building."

As importantly, mutually beneficial win-win solutions exist for this property. Analysis from experienced preservation architects has shown that the **Forest Home Library can be restored** and put to good use. **Historic tax credits** – up to 40% - would be available to fund the restoration. Compatible additions would also be allowed. The restoration of another lauded Corten Steel building in a northern climate – Illinois' John Deere World Headquarters – not only received preservation awards but the building was selected as one of the Illinois 200 Great Places by the American Institute of Architects Illinois component and was recognized by *USA Today Travel* magazine as one of Illinois' 25 Must See Places. Just as the Soldiers Home's Old Main - built in 1869 and vacant for 30 years with a hole in its roof - was able to be redeveloped successfully and put to an important use housing homeless veterans, so too does Forest Home Library - a significant 1966 building vacant for a mere three years and in excellent condition - also have many years of service left to the community.

Additionally, **a site at 10th and Maple just blocks away from the library site, easily meets all the space, program, and parking needs of a new medical center.** It does so while being more walkable to more local schools, bus lines, and the current library than the Forest Home site. Further, it puts to a higher and better use largely vacant surface parking in a district with 1000% more parking than the next highest city shopping district and provides the City with the opportunity to gain tax revenue from two sites instead of one. The use of the skilled labor necessary for preservation work also supports local jobs in a way that demolition does not.

Critically, during a time of environmental crisis, **preservation is the sustainable choice.** A standard new office building takes 39 years to recover the energy used in its construction. This number jumps to 65 years if the embodied energy and carbon impact of demolition is factored in. Construction waste generated by demolition fills our landfills, eating up valuable green space and costing taxpayers money. To demolish highly-repairable historic buildings is to begin the cycle of endless landfilling and

carbon emission. Environmental responsibility requires that our primary question not be ‘why should this be saved’ but “why should we throw this away?”

Finally, it should be remembered that **designation does not stop demolition or development, it simply creates a process where the public is given an opportunity to weigh in** on the future of their community before demolition approval is granted. For buildings with the significance of the Forest Home Library, the public deserves that opportunity.

The City of Milwaukee has an incredible cultural and architectural heritage. If valued and significant places like Forest Home Library are treated as disposable by the City, the message to residents and the wider world is that our City – the places that matter to us – are throwaway. We urge you to send a different message and declare that **the places of this great city are not trash** – they are valuable assets worthy of celebrating and protecting. **We urge you to support win-win and designate the Forest Home Library.**

Thank you for your service to the people of Milwaukee.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Ebersole
Executive Director