

**Comments to the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission  
Regarding the Catherine Foley/ Wreck Room/ MIAD Building, 266 E. Erie Street**

**by Don Schwamb, Founder, Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project  
Monday September 11, 2023 – 3:00pm – City Hall**

I am Don Schwamb, Founder of the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project. For the past 29 years this organization has been documenting the history of the LGBTQ community in Wisconsin, which over the years has come out with 2 books, numerous media articles, and created the largest digital archive and website of LGBTQ materials in the state.

I am a preservationist at heart. For example, I was one of those closely involved in the designation of the East Side Commercial Historic District (which included the Iron Block and Grain Exchange buildings) in 1987.

And I was a regular customer when the subject building housed the Wreck Room gay bar from 1972 to 1996.

When the subject was first raised in February regarding a request to have the building's status changed to allow demolition, as a preservationist and historical buff, my first reaction was to try to save the building.

Since then, I have reviewed the developer's report and photos. I was also recently given the opportunity to view the interior of the subject building. The interior is largely gutted and while recognizable to me as the space of the old Wreck Room bar, it would be a shock to most people to see its poor condition due to the fire damage.

I regret to say that, after reviewing the data, talking to the developer, and viewing the property, I think saving it is impractical. While I am not a structural engineer, as a mechanical engineer by training I can appreciate the poor condition of the crumbling walls and foundation, as well as the extensive damage to and deterioration of the overall structure and roof.

During these few previous months, both Joseph Property Development and General Capital have been open with me, and have shown a willingness to work with the LGBTQ community to make the building's potential loss an opportunity for community building.

Specifically, we have begun to discuss potential use of some of the materials from a demolished building for an outreach to the LGBTQ community for fundraising to help fund continuing historical preservation in the LGBTQ community through my organization and our fiscal sponsor, Cream City Foundation.

I have also proposed any replacement building include a prominent plaque, to display a photo of the former building in its heyday, accompanied by a short biography of the building's meaning and contribution to the communities it served over its lifetime. I am convinced that we could turn this loss into a real benefit to the community through the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project's working with them.

While this building seems to have reached the end of its useful life as it exists now, I think there is a solid basis to salvage something from an otherwise major community loss. I will mourn the building's loss to the community and neighborhood should demolition be approved; but I welcome what its loss could mean to the LGBTQ community going forward.

Thank you.