

Comments to the Zoning, Neighborhoods & Development Committee, Milwaukee, 9/19/17

(Susan Appel)

Good Morning.

I'm here to speak as an architectural historian whose specialty is the architectural development of pre-Prohibition Midwestern breweries. My research tracks breweries, including Milwaukee's, which is why the Gettelman buildings we're currently talking about interest me. They are the last remaining examples of structures from the very beginnings of one of Milwaukee's significant breweries. As such, they are inherently important historically – and as a group, with their lagering cellars intact. I strongly support their designation and protection – *in situ* – where they have stood since 1856/1858. And I urge you to support the permanent historic designation that has already been supported by the HPC.

Very recently, MillerCoors revealed a new proposal for Gettelman. They now want to “trim away” later, but still historic additions to the building that was initially the Schweickhardt/Gettelman family home. Then, they propose uprooting it and moving it to some other site – nearby, perhaps, but divorced from its place of origin. Finally, they would demolish the other structures here, even the underground cellars, and re-develop the current site for parking. This proposal is neither a “compromise” nor a “solution” in any way, and it does not begin to approach anything that could legitimately be called historic preservation.

For MillerCoors to rip the house off its foundation, then destroy the other Gettelman elements would be to obliterate entirely the historic integrity of the close relationship among the parts of this small complex. Allowing that to happen would also be to disregard totally the already established historic significance that reflects why this group of structures is so special. The Gettelman buildings form the only place in the city of Milwaukee where one can experience the reality of what it was to start a brewery in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. People like the Schweickhardts and the Gettelmans had a very personal stake in this undertaking. They lived and worked here, in a collection of small, vernacular structures that allowed them to live and brew and age the beer that eventually made them a successful member of the Milwaukee brewing community. The central importance of brewing to Milwaukee's development is still acknowledged in the city's nickname, “Brew City.” And yet, the last remaining instance of the roots of that industry is threatened with being swept aside to make room for parking. Or is that merely a temporary ploy to clear more land for later large-scale corporate development without historic inconvenience?

The City of Milwaukee operates a notable program in Historic Preservation. It is designed to avoid the wholesale destruction of historic buildings that, in today's world, may seem, on the surface of things, to be of little worth. Certainly, in contrast with later, larger, and more well-known local brewery complexes – including Miller's own – these Gettelman buildings may seem inconsequential. But they are not. Instead, the Gettelman group represents the very heart of nearly every pre-Prohibition brewery

in Milwaukee, and, for that matter, in the whole Midwest before the 1870s. Protecting and preserving this early group – where they stand – is to honor the efforts of those who laid the foundations of Milwaukee’s great commercial brewing industry. Even simple structures can speak volumes about a past that we have, too often, forgotten, or which we choose not to acknowledge.

But what to do with these buildings? Use them: rather than seeing them as “in the way,” tie them into the Miller tours. Let them stand in for Miller’s own very similar original buildings, long ago destroyed, so that visitors can better appreciate the full range of brewing’s architectural and industrial history. Or find other ways to bring attention to them, and celebrate them, as is happening in many other places – St. Louis and Cincinnati, for example, where they’re making the most of their brewing history as part of innovative economic development projects.

Ultimately, appreciate the fact that you still have these reminders of the past. They’ve been nearly erased in so many other brewing centers. Please – and this goes out to MillerCoors as well as to you, the local authorities who must review this issue – bring far more sensitivity and appreciation to the importance of Gettelman’s original structures. If you let them go, they will be gone forever.

Thank you.

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