

Subject Property Owner's Objection to a Permanent Historic District Designation of Select Jefferson Street Properties (File No. 191824)

To: City of Milwaukee Common Council
Zoning, Neighborhoods &
Development Committee

From: Seven51, LLC
(Property Owner of 751 N. Jefferson St.)

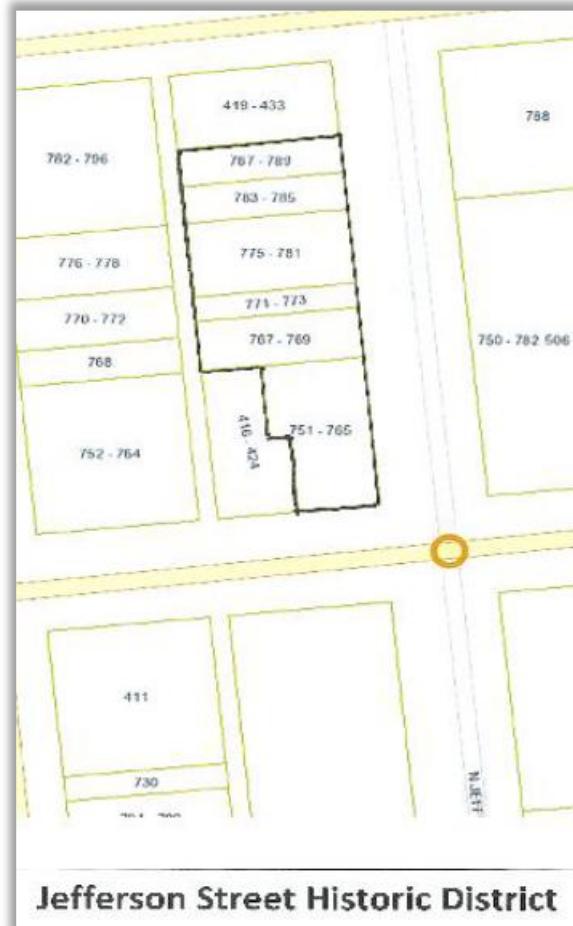
c/o **Continuum Architects + Planners**

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Legal Standards for Historic District Nominations

Section 320-21-1 The purpose of this section is to:

- a. Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the city's **cultural, social, economic**, political and **architectural history**.
- c. Stabilize and improve **property values**.
- e. Protect and enhance the city attractions to residents, tourists and visitors, and serve as a **support and stimulus to business and industry**.

Section 320-21-9-e 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**.

The Study Report Shows that these Properties do not Qualify for Designation

Section 320-21-3-e "Historic, architectural and cultural significance" means the attributes of a district, site or structure that possess **integrity of location, design, settings, materials, workmanship and association** which consider the following: . . .

- Most buildings on the block have had mild to substantial changes to their exteriors undercutting the integrity of design, materials and workmanship.
 - **Watts Building** has remained relatively static over time, but some significant changes (Study Report: 4-7)
 - at least one entrance was relocated and two front entrances were eliminated in 1974
 - removal of the original letters spelling out "Watts" along Jefferson Street at some undisclosed time
 - the removal of the original bronze lanterns on the Jefferson Street elevation at some undisclosed time
 - **J. Home Building** has undergone significant alteration (Study Report: 7-9)
 - "Has a rather remarkable story" (Study Report: 8) detailing significant renovations in original workmanship and materials, which have been vastly modified
 - Major changes to front of building in 1916-17, changing a large portion of the front façade in both character and materials for reuse from residential to commercial
 - Interior modified significantly with little to no remnants of its most notable occupant
 - Additional rounds of major modifications in 1951 and 1965-1966.
 - Very little of the original building integrity remains
 - **George Augustus Tiffany House** (Study Report: 9-11)
 - Study Report: "sliver of a building" was once part of 3-unit rowhouse that "can still be read as part of a rowhouse in the Federal style" (Study Report: 10)
 - In addition to no longer being in its original form, the building has an additional story constructed, which has substituted roof, modified windows, among other changes
 - **Matthew Keenan House** (Study Report: 11-15)
 - Major fire gutted the building in 1984; substantial four-story addition, which is contemporary in appearance, constructed at the rear at the same time
 - **William Alfred Webber House** (Study Report: 15-17)
 - Characteristic geometric ornamentation, which is characteristic of its Greek Revival style, appears to have been mostly removed from the roof
 - Lower windows of house are modern to accommodate a commercial tenant
 - Much of the setting and impression of the structure has been changed due to the twin structure next door having been substantially modified
 - **William Alfred Webber-Owned House** (Study Report: 17-20)
 - Former twin house to the previous house
 - Substantially changed façade in 1907 (storefront added)

- As a cluster of buildings variously built over 75 years between 1852-1925, there is not integrity of settings and association as required by the ordinance
 - Just one side of Jefferson Street and not the entire block (6 total structures)
 - 5 Pre-Civil War Era Structures, 1 Post-World War I Structure
 - Watts building is an outlier in both time (75 years younger) and original purpose (always was commercial in nature)
 - The 5 Pre-Civil War Era Structures were originally conceived as residential but 3 have undergone substantial modifications, much of which has been driven by conversion to commercial purposes decades or over a century ago
 - The district no longer maintains the integrity of residential character of the buildings; there is an inherent loss of setting and feeling that has occurred over many decades by the conversion of the properties to commercial uses
 - The surrounding buildings and uses do not support the settings and association of this short stretch of the west side of Jefferson Street – it’s distinct from its surroundings but almost in a jarring manner



Objections to the Recommended Findings

Section 320-21-3-e "Historic, architectural and cultural significance" means the attributes of a district, site or structure that possess integrity of location, design, settings, materials, workmanship and association **which consider the following:**

e-1. Its exemplification and development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the city, state of Wisconsin or the United States.

- The Time Capsule Argument
 - District is not an "intact time capsule"
 - 5 of the 6 buildings were originally residences, but having undergone substantial changes to commercial, they no longer represent that purpose
 - A time capsule spanning nearly 75 years (1852-1925)?
- For Watts building particularly, there may be cultural heritage with the tea room and the luxuries store but those are gone and not coming back, and cannot be memorialized by a static outward appearance of the building

e-3. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city.

- The George Watts family name is certainly well known but the business is long closed
- Respectfully, the others are not widely recognizable

e-5. Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

- There is no homogeneity in style in the proposed district
- For the nearly 75 years during which the buildings were constructed, the characteristics are disparate and not collectively distinguishing
- Many of the buildings have had significant structural and changes altering their original styles

e-6. Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, craftsman or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the city.

- Edward Townsend Mix and Herbert Tullgren were prominent architects and their names have been used as justifications for previous designations
- Does this mean that their name association always triggers automatic designation?
- How does that support a district designation where they did not design the other buildings?

e-9. Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city.

- Lacks a singular physical characteristic
 - No homogeneity in style of all the buildings in the proposed district
 - Surrounding buildings and uses do not support it as a unique location

Have we unequivocally rebutted each of the ordinance criteria?

No...

...but we don't have to because of the ordinance standard:

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.** (Section 320-21-9-e)

Perspective from Subject Matter Experts

- Introduction to Continuum Architects + Planners



- 1986 U.S. Department of the Interior approval of **The Historic East Side Commercial District** for the National Register of Historic Places
 - Contributing and non-contributing buildings
 - Federal Historic Tax Credit opportunities and incentives
- Detrimental Effects of District Designation
 - Owners of these buildings have made necessary changes without totally altering the overall character of the environment.
 - History is iterative and evolves, it is not a constant static overview of time
 - Burdens on Owners:
 - Time & Expense – Can Lead to Unwanted Blight
 - Exclusivity – Can Lead to Discrimination
- There is a better way, and we are willing to work toward it – together.

Conclusion

Back to the Beginning: The purpose of the preservation ordinance is to:

- a. Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the city's **cultural, social, economic**, political and **architectural history**.
- c. Stabilize and improve **property values**.
- e. Protect and enhance the city attractions to residents, tourists and visitors, and serve as a **support and stimulus to business and industry**.

Section 320-21-1

Please vote **against** adopting the district designation resolution.