

June 25, 2021

To the Honorable Chair and Commissioners,

1100 S. 5th Street, Ste. 319
Milwaukee, WI 53204
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The Milwaukee Preservation Alliance urges your support for File 210341 for the allocation of \$150 million of American Rescue Plan Act grant funds to support affordable housing.

The City's ARPA funds represent an historic opportunity for Milwaukee to invest in affordable housing in underserved neighborhoods and protect our environment by investing in the restoration of hundreds of City-owned 1- and 2- family in rem properties, while further bolstering existing affordable housing initiatives, the Housing Trust Fund, and the Compliance Loan Program.

A commitment to restoring City-owned homes before demolition is pursued would be a strong investment in underserved neighborhoods that would create rather than eliminate desperately needed affordable housing, returning properties to productive use and the tax rolls rather than reducing them to empty lots. A commitment to restoration would also support more local skilled labor than mechanical demolition.

The historically high current cost of lumber makes creating affordable housing through new construction even more challenging than usual. Existing homes, however, are often built of irreplaceable old growth lumber. As the City considers its developing citywide affordable housing plan and use of ARPA funds, it would be valuable not to demolish the Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) that older homes represent and focus efforts on restoring these homes – making neighborhoods safer while bringing vacant homes back to life.

Investing in the restoration of vacant properties is also the environmentally friendly choice. Renovating an older home vs. tearing down the same structure and replacing it with a new building has the equivalent effect of removing 93 cars from the road for an entire year. The winners of this year's highest international architecture award have said "Demolishing is a decision of easiness and short term. It is a waste of many things — a waste of energy, a waste of material, and a waste of history. Moreover, it has a very negative social impact. It is an act of violence."

I urge the City to move away from a question of 'why should this be saved?' to one of 'why should we throw this away?' We have an opportunity to change the narrative, to not throw away affordable housing but restore it, invest in neighborhoods in need, and protect the environment. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Ebersole
Executive Director
Milwaukee Preservation Alliance