

November 23, 2020

Dear Members of the Heritage Preservation Commission,

I am beyond grateful to live in St. Paul, a city with leaders who had the foresight to provide the 2040 Comprehensive Plan before the pandemic and George Floyd's death. I attest that the Demolition of Loras Hall correlates with the Plan's Core Values. We are all called to implement the Plan. The process requires us to get comfortable with discomfort. The University of St. Thomas' (UST) Loras Hall provides the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) the opportunity to demonstrate its ability to support the Core Values of the 2040 Plan. The Plan's first Core Value, **Equity and Opportunity**, demands that we face our history and ourselves.

Loras Hall is named for Bishop Mathias Loras who, as recently discovered, enslaved a woman named Marie Louise. Dr. Julie Sullivan, president of St. Thomas, wrote to the campus community, "A core conviction of the University of St. Thomas is to see and respect the dignity of every human being; the sin of slavery directly contradicts that conviction, and Bishop Loras' participation in slavery is reprehensible." I believe that our community resonates with Dr. Sullivan's words.

At recent meetings about the fate of Loras Hall preservationists quoted Winston Churchill's, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." That warning obligates us to face ALL of our history. Loras Hall is located in Macalester Groveland. Our history of redline deed covenants has made us the whitest - and wealthiest - neighborhood in St. Paul. Historic racism cannot be denied as a reason to demolish Loras Hall.

Nor can we deny the "post war" mentality that permeates the area surrounding St. Thomas. Some activist members of our community continue to refer to "the war years," a period in the early part of this century when neighbors successfully beat back St. Thomas' expansion plans and negotiated a number of restrictions against the campus. The 2004 Conditional Use Permit (CUP) that governs UST's campus is touted as a document etched in stone that can never be modified to conform to current times and circumstance. The CUP established the West Summit Neighborhood Advisory Committee (WSNAC), with eight votes designated to eight neighbor representatives and only three votes to the five UST representatives. When I joined WSNAC as an MGCC Representative in 2012 the neighbors instructed me that the four neighbor groups banded together as the "Neighborhood Caucus" to be "opponents" or "adversaries" to UST. It was explained, "WSNAC is a most unusual type of board as it is basically composed of two opposing parties, merged to operate by the City." For six years I sat at that table wondering what could possibly create a shift toward peace.

Assuming good intent requires me to believe that the authors of the CUP did not anticipate the unintended consequences for our community of an adversarial stance

toward St. Thomas, the largest of the 17 private colleges in Minnesota and a major employer in our community. Because students, I've been told, "aren't a protected class," it is accepted as natural for WSNAC to collect spoils of war in the form of restricted deed covenants against student renters. No one batted an eye when a member of WSNAC profited from the most recent transaction. This is on top of the restrictive Student Housing Overlay District that surrounds UST.

Discrimination breeds discrimination. At a meeting about a racial slur at UST a neighbor asked a Black student leader whether he "*feels welcome in our neighborhood*," He paused and replied, "*Ma'am, no student feels welcome in your neighborhood.*" Macalester Groveland is the most educated and wealthiest district in St. Paul. Knowing how to play the game and having the resources to litigate have led our community to this point.

I attended the Listening Session that the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) hosted on October 6, 2020. The invitation read:

"The heritage preservation profession has been very active lately on the topic of bias and exclusion as a byproduct of designated districts. Two distinct points have been articulated concerning bias and exclusion:

- 1. Heritage preservation could result in economic exclusion creating a form of 'redlining'.*
- 2. Designation can perpetuate a divisive form of nostalgia and may tell narrative of the culturally privileged."*

This meeting showed me that the HPC recognizes its duty to face history. You have the power to create the shift toward peace that leads our community to a more equitable future.

At the November 10, 2020 WSNAC discussion about the demolition of Loras Hall the representative from Undergraduate Student Government at St. Thomas, a junior majoring in Justice and Peace Studies, clarified the Heritage Preservation Commission's choice:

It's really powerful to consider the issue of the building's name. As a student at UST I take issue with a building named after a slaveowner. I take pride in my university and being a student here but with something like that coming up it makes me consider how I represent myself. The building holds that name and it has stood for that name.

I would agree with you that there is significance in the building itself and I think its important to realize that. But history is not always painting us in the light we want to be painted in. It is our responsibility to look at the light of progress and how to move forward. I understand the significance of Cass Gilbert's architecture, but this building will come down and he will not be forgotten. This speaks more to the community, to back this building or to

not back this building given the name. Are we going to put this building before progress and set that precedent as well?

This is the time to face our history rather than revere it without context. I believe the unintended consequence of demolishing Loras Hall will create a shift toward peace in our community. It will lead to a more equitable future for Macalester Groveland. Your vote on the demolition of UST's Loras Hall will demonstrate to the citizens of St. Paul how much the Heritage Preservation Commission values our first Core Value, **Equity and Opportunity**.

Please support the University of St. Thomas in its bid to demolish Loras Hall to make way for a new Science, Engineering, Technology & Arts building that will be more sustainable in its structure, more inclusive in its design and more welcoming to all members of our community.

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Re: Opposition to Demolition Permit Application filed by the University of St. Thomas concerning North Dormitory (Loras Hall), 2260 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, MN

Dear Mr. Gause and Heritage Preservation Commission:

I write to oppose the application made by the University of St. Thomas (the “University”) to demolish Cass Gilbert’s North Dormitory (also known as Loras Hall¹), which was constructed in 1893-1894, and is the oldest non-house structure in the West Summit Avenue Historic District. Preserving North Dormitory is important to all of Saint Paul and to future generations.

North Dormitory Reflects our Architectural, Cultural, and Social History.

The story of North Dormitory begins in 1885. Archbishop John Ireland had a vision to develop a Catholic institution of higher education in Saint Paul and commenced the development of what today is the University of St. Thomas, which began on the University’s current North Campus. It was always the Archbishop’s dream however, that there would be a separate seminary.

In 1890, the Methodist James J. Hill offered to build and endow a separate seminary for the training of Catholic priests. Mr. Hill was motivated to do this in honor of his wife, who was a devout Catholic. Mr. Hill had some very definite ideas about how this new seminary should be built. So, instead of simply giving the money to the Archbishop, Mr. Hill hired 32-year-old Cass Gilbert, a Saint Paul native, to plan the entire seminary campus and design its structures. Gilbert

¹ In Cass Gilbert’s original Seminary plan, the building was identified as “North Dormitory.” The structure kept that name until 1913 when a new dormitory was erected to the south of “South Dormitory.” To eliminate the directional confusion, the three dormitories were renamed after former bishops, with North Dormitory being renamed as Loras Hall. It has recently been revealed that Bishop Loras, who was never in Minnesota, was a slave owner. The University is presently considering whether the Loras name should be removed. I will use the name given by the architect, as its 1913 renaming and potential new name are not the reasons why the structure is significant and why it should be preserved.

had previously worked for Hill when in 1887 he was given the task of assisting with the powerhouse, fence, and gates, for Hill's mansion at the opposite end of Summit Avenue.

Cass Gilbert came up with a plan to build the Seminary campus with seven separate buildings surrounding by spacious landscape. In 1891, Gilbert personally designed each of the first six buildings: North Dormitory, South Dormitory (today known as Cretin Hall), the Refectory Building, the Classrooms Building, the Administration Building, and the Gymnasium. The first six buildings were designed by Gilbert in the Renaissance Revival or Northern Italian Revival style. Gilbert was the Superintendent of Construction in the 1893-1894 timeframe. The sixty-five seminarians moved to the new Seminary Campus on September 6, 1894. In a September 4, 1895 ceremony, Mr. Hill transferred the six buildings to the Archdiocese of St. Paul. In Gilbert's original master plan for the Seminary Campus, the seventh building was a chapel was to be built just west of North Dormitory.

Gilbert's commission from James J. Hill to design the campus and each of the buildings for the new Saint Paul Seminary came at an important juncture in his career. In 1891, Gilbert had ended a six-year partnership with James Knox Taylor and had just established his own architectural firm. "For Gilbert, the Seminary buildings were an important job during a formative period of his professional life." [Charlene Roise, "The University of Saint Thomas, the St. Paul Seminary, and Historic Summit Avenue: An Assessment of Historic Resources at 21 (January 26, 2017) (hereinafter "Roise"). "The Seminary was an early and important commission for architect Cass Gilbert" and "a significant milestone for his career." *Id.* at 3. The year after the new Seminary's completion, Cass Gilbert was awarded the commission to design the Minnesota State Capitol Building, and thereafter became one of this country's leading, progressive architects.

Reverend Patrick Danehy, an early Seminary professor, described the six campus buildings as "in the North Italian style simple, solid, and impressive." [cited in Roise at 22]. He noted how "[t]hey are all built of red pressed brick, have either plain gable or hip roofs, and by the solidity of their walls remind one strongly of the monastic edifices of a bygone age." *Id.* The dormitory buildings were unique for their time in that each seminarian was provided a two room suite, consisting of a bedroom and study.

Gilbert's original campus plan was completed in 1905, when St. Mary's Chapel, designed by Clarence H. Johnston, was constructed at the top of the hill overlooking the Mississippi River, just to the west of North Dormitory. In 1913, a third dormitory was added to the Seminary Campus and was named Grace Hall.

The original Cass Gilbert designed Seminary campus remained unaltered for many decades. In 1968, after McCarthy Gym was constructed, the original Gymnasium was converted into the Seminary's service center. The Classrooms Building was demolished and replaced in 1972. The Refectory Building was razed in 1978 when the Binz Refectory Building was added to the Seminary campus. In 1982, the University acquired North Dormitory as a residence hall for students in its St. John Vianney undergraduate seminary program, eight years prior to when North Dormitory was designated as a historic structure.

In 1987, the University acquired most of the acreage of the St. Paul Seminary campus, bounded by Summit, Cretin, and Goodrich Avenues, and Mississippi River Boulevard. The

Seminary retained a small seven-acre campus at the northwest corner of this area. By this time, two of Gilbert's original six buildings – the Rectory and Classrooms Buildings – had already been demolished. Later in 1987, the Administration Building was demolished. Thus, only three of the original Seminary buildings remain today: North Dormitory, South Dormitory, and the Gymnasium.

For many years after the University's acquisition, the three dormitories on the former Seminary Campus continued to be used as student residences. North Dormitory was later remodeled and converted into office space, which is the building's current use. North Dormitory's exterior, however, has had only minor alterations and presents substantially the same appearance today as when it was constructed 126 years ago in 1894.

North Dormitory is a Contributing Structure to the West Summit Avenue Historic District.

The West Summit Avenue Historic District was locally designated as a heritage district by the City of Saint Paul in 1990. On May 4, 1993, the West Summit Avenue Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places, because it met the qualifying criteria of historical interest (Criteria A) and architectural interest (Criteria C). The Areas of Significance noted in the National Register Form for the District were for Community Planning and Development and for Architecture (Sec. 8). The Period of Significance is identified as from 1885 to 1938. *Id.*

The noted Architects for the District include Cass Gilbert, the planner and designer of North Dormitory. (Sec. 8, p. 54). The noted builders include James Carlisle and Sons, the contractor for North Dormitory. *Id.* In the Narrative Statement of Significance, it is noted how the Historic District is comprised of two main elements; architect-designed houses and “the three campuses which are integral to the history of west Summit: [Macalester College, University of Saint Thomas, and the St. Paul Seminary which] pre-dated all but a handful of residences on west Summit.” *Id.* at 55.

North Dormitory is presently the fifth oldest remaining structure in the West Summit Avenue Historic District; the four oldest are houses. Thus, at over 125 years old, North Dormitory is the oldest institutional structure within the entire Historic District. The next oldest is North Dormitory's immediate neighbor to the west, St. Mary's Chapel, which was completed in 1905. Wallace Hall at Macalester College was opened in 1907. St. Paul's Church on the Hill, designed by Emmanuel Masqueray, was not built until 1913. The University's Aquinas Hall, the first with a Collegiate Gothic style, was not built until 1931. North Dormitory, St. Mary's Chapel, and Aquinas Hall were each found to be contributing structures to the National Register historic designation, as they “were constructed in the period of significance” and “contribute to the streetscape”. National Register Form at 64.

Charlene Roise stated in her Assessment: “The local heritage preservation commission, which reviews applications for building and demolition permits in the historic district, resists proposals to demolish or substantially modify contributing properties.” Roise at 2. “In addition, National Register properties are covered by the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act, so any interested party can initiate a lawsuit to protect a threatened historic property under the act.” *Id.* at 4.

The University has Plans to Demolish All of Cass Gilbert's Seminary Buildings.

In October 2003, the University's Board of Trustees adopted a set of Campus Plan Studies prepared by Richard Dober, a campus planning consultant. The Dober Study noted how "UST anchors the west end of St. Paul's Summit Avenue, a prestigious 19th century boulevard connecting the landscaped Mississippi River frontage with the State Capitol and Roman Catholic Cathedral several miles to the east." Dober at 6. In describing the South Campus, the Dober Study stated: "Of special interest are the genesis, current use, and future of three structures designed by Cass Gilbert as part of the Seminary's original master plan and now assigned to University use. Grace and Cretin halls are dormitories. Loras Hall is a multi-function administration building." *Id.* at 8.

As a part of its concurrent 2003 campus expansion project, the University submitted to the City of Saint Paul its "Anticipated Growth and Development Statement," dated March 5, 2004. The University reported to the Saint Paul Planning Commission that it intended to replace some of its older residence halls including "Cretin and Grace on the South Campus." Illustrative drawings from the Campus Plan Studies show new dormitories in the locations where Cretin and Grace now stand. Cretin Hall is labelled as "scheduled for demolition." The University noted: "construction of the South Campus halls could occur before 2009." The Plan studies show North Dormitory remaining in place, surrounded by its landscaped grounds.

In November 2016, the University's Board of Trustees approved a new ten-year Campus Master Plan, which it developed with the campus planning firm of Hastings + Chivetta. In a contemporary Press Release, the University explained that the Master Plan's future projects included "a third science and engineering building on the south campus, an arts building on Summit Avenue west of McNeely Hall (Opus College of Business), an expansion of the Chapel of St. Thomas Aquinas, four new residential buildings and additional parking spaces." The Press Release highlighted: "In his presentation to the board, Chris Chivetta, president of Hastings + Chivetta, said he was pleased the plan would allow St. Thomas to construct another science and engineering building while retaining Loras Hall by moving it 100 feet to the west. Constructed in 1894, Loras is the oldest building on campus and is in the West Summit Avenue Historic District."

The 2016 Master Plan identified the anticipated size of the new Science and Engineering Building to be 137,000 square feet (the University is now proposing a smaller building of 120,000 square feet). New parking spaces are to be added to the Anderson Parking Facility to compensate for the loss of parking from the elimination of the surface parking lot identified as the site for the new Science and Engineering Building. The Plan also proposed eliminating residential uses of part of Murray-Herrick Hall and the two University-owned apartment buildings at 2171 and 2175 Grand Avenue. The Master Plan proposes that those facilities would be renovated and repurposed to create 34,000 square feet of additional administrative space, i.e. office space.

It is in the context of the 2016 Master Plan that Charlene Roise prepared her Assessment which is dated January 26, 2017. The Executive Summary of the Assessment begins by referencing the University's "ten-year master plan." The Roise Report states that its focus is on two topics: (1) evaluating the historical significance of properties owned by St. Thomas on Summit Avenue and (2) to reevaluate the St. Paul Seminary Historic District, for which a nomination was prepared in 1984, but it was never adopted by the City of Saint Paul or listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In evaluating the historical significance of North Dormitory, the Roise Report repeatedly refers to its historic and architectural significance, and notes that both North Dormitory and St. Mary's Chapel are already protected resources and are designated as "contributing structures" in the West Summit Avenue Historic District. The Report's conclusions state that by 2017, demolitions of the Rectory, Classrooms, and Administration Buildings, and the intrusion of acres of surface parking lots, had "compromised the integrity of the St. Paul Seminary Historic District." This conclusion is not remarkable, given the University's previously stated intention to demolish both Cretin and Grace Halls. But, that is as far as the Roise Report goes. It is inappropriate for the University to now attempt to use the Roise Report to support the demolition of North Dormitory, a purpose completely at odds with the text of the Assessment and the reasons why the Roise Report was prepared. The HPC should conclude, instead, that the Roise Report supports and amplifies the many reasons why it is appropriate to conclude that North Dormitory has historical, architectural, social, and contextual merit, and should not be demolished.

Last year, on June 7, 2019, the University submitted a Site Plan Review Application to the City of Saint Paul for a project which was described as "New permanent parking lot west of Loras Hall." The accompanying "Loras Hall Demo Plan" depicted the removal of all of the existing trees and lawn between St. Mary's Chapel and Loras Hall, and replacing the green space with a 59-stall bituminous parking lot. The Estimated Construction Start was stated as August 1, 2019. The University subsequently withdrew the Application. Curiously, the site for the proposed "New permanent parking lot" is the same site as had been identified by the 2016 Master Plan as the location to which North Dormitory was to be moved.

Demolition of North Dormitory is Contrary to and Would Violate the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act.

The Minnesota Environmental Rights Act proclaims that "each person is entitled by right to the protection, preservation, and enhancement of ... historical resources." *See* Minnesota Statutes Section 116B.01 and 02, Subd. 4. The Legislature has found that it is in the public interest to protect historical resources from "impairment or destruction." *Id.* The State law applies whether the building is publicly owned or whether it is privately owned. As noted by Charlene Roise, under this law "any interested party can initiate a lawsuit to protect a threatened historic property."

In considering the rights of the public in preserving historic resources, several questions are asked. First, is the structure a historic resource? Here, there is no question. North Dormitory "is considered a historic property for purposes of the Minnesota Historic Sites Act." November 6, 2020 letter from the University to the HPC at 5. In community meetings, the University's representatives have acknowledged North Dormitory's historical status. By its designation as a "contributing structure" in both the Saint Paul and National Register Historic Districts, North Dormitory is a "historical resource" under MERA.

The second question asked is whether the conduct of the building's owner is likely to cause the "impairment or destruction" of the historical resource. Minn. Stat. § 116B.04(b). The demolition of North Dormitory would unquestionably cause its "impairment or destruction."

Finally, the owner of the historic resource may "show, a way of an affirmative defense, that there is no feasible and prudent alternative and the conduct at issue is consistent with and

reasonably required for promotion of public health, safety, and welfare in light of the state's paramount concern for the protection of its [historic resources] from pollution, impairment, or destruction. Economic considerations alone shall not constitute a defense hereunder." Minn. Stat. § 116B.04(b). In interpreting this statute, the Minnesota Judiciary has focused on the Legislature's "paramount concern" for protecting the State's historic resources. *See State By Archabal v County of Hennepin*, 495 N.W.2d 416 (Minn. 1993). Just three months ago, the Minnesota Court of Appeals considered the case of the historic Pastoret Terrace building in Duluth and held that the trial court was wrong to issue a demolition permit, even though there had been a fire in the building and it was uninhabitable. *See Ringsred v. Duluth EDA*, No. A19-2031 (Minn. Ct. App., Aug. 31, 2020). So, that's the legal side of the historic preservation argument.

In this particular instance, the University has already acknowledged that it can build its proposed four story, 120,000 square foot STEAM Building entirely on the surface parking lot to the east of North Dormitory: see "South Campus Master Plan – Loras Remains Option." The University asserts that its "preferred" alternative is to have the "front door" of the new building facing Summit Avenue. "South Campus Master Plan – Loras Removed Option (Preferred). Thus, the University's assertion in its November 6, 2020 letter to the HPC, that it "strongly believes that its preferred option requires the removal of Loras Hall" is neither compelling nor with any legal impact. The University's preference simply does not justify destruction of a "historical resource."

In the University's November 6 letter, it also asserts" "[T]he economic value or usefulness of [North Dormitory] as it exists now, even as modified or altered, cannot compete with the economic value or usefulness of the proposed structure that will replace the present building. The University also argues that it does not want to spend any money in renovating North Dormitory. This argument also fails in light of the Legislature's specific rejection of "[e]conomic considerations alone" as allowing destruction of a protected historic resource.

The University's other arguments also are overstated. Just to the south of the location for the proposed STEAM building are acres of surface parking lots which can be used for future expansion of related University science and engineering programs.

North Dormitory currently functions as office space. The University's 2016 Master Plan calls for the conversion of existing residential spaces in other campus locations to office uses. Instead, the proposed office space needs identified in the 2016 Master Plan could be housed in North Dormitory. Or, North Dormitory could be reconverted to its original use as student housing. The point here is not to argue reuse possibilities, but simply to note that there are potentially viable reuses of North Dormitory which could meet the University's stated needs.

The Heritage Preservation Commission Should Deny the University's Request to Demolish North Dormitory.

Saint Paul and its citizens pride themselves on living in a Historic City. We oftentimes talk about context and historic buildings. It's important to keep in mind that as one comes east from the Mississippi River along Summit Avenue, you first come up a landscaped hill, then you see St. Mary's Chapel, and then blocking the view of the existing Engineering and Science Buildings, there's North Dormitory. So, North Dormitory is important, not only as a historic

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building itself, but also for the way in which it helps provide historic context for St. Mary's Chapel and the West Summit Avenue National Register Historic District.

North Dormitory showcases a different type of architecture than the newer St. Thomas buildings on Summit Avenue and what the University will build in the future, assuming yet another Collegiate Gothic building is constructed on the surface parking lot to the east of North Dormitory. So, North Dormitory is important in its architectural context. I certainly hope that the University does not spend millions of dollars moving Loras Hall. I would prefer that Loras Hall stay where it is and that the

University provide improved landscaping, both to the west and to the south of North Dormitory. There are existing grassy areas there with large trees that could be a very fine and positive landscaped part of the South Campus. North Dormitory is also important as the only one of the six original Cass Gilbert structures to be historically designated. Given its Summit Avenue location, it is the building best suited for preservation.

To summarize: the preservation of North Dormitory is important because of the people with whom it is associated; Archbishop John Ireland, James J. Hill, and Cass Gilbert. Cass Gilbert earned the commission to build the Minnesota State Capitol the year after he finished with the Seminary campus project. Preservation of North Dormitory is important for the building itself: its Renaissance Revival or Northern Italian Revival architectural style is unique and distinguishing on Summit Avenue. North Dormitory is a contributing structure to both the local and national historic districts. It provides context to St. Mary's Chapel, to the slope and the ground going toward Mississippi River Boulevard, and to Summit Avenue's landscaped setting. North Dormitory is a community treasure, to be cherished, which is why you should deny the requested demolition permit.

Very truly yours,

/s/ Marc J Manderscheid

Marc J Manderscheid

cc: Historic Saint Paul
Ramsey County Historical Society
Rethos
Summit Avenue Residential Preservation Association
Cass Gilbert Society