

Good morning,

I write today to support the University of St. Thomas' plan for demolition of Loras Hall. I'm familiar with the demolition plan as a result of my participation on the Macalester Groveland Community Council and its Housing and Land Use Committee, and I also serve as the chair of the MGCC Inclusivity Task Force, though I speak only in an individual capacity and not on behalf of the council or any committee in writing this letter.

In short, from the arguments I've seen presented, the demolition of Loras Hall is consistent with the values of our community in terms of inclusivity, diversity, and design, and the heritage or historical value of the site is minimal at best.

To start with the positive attributes of allowing the Loras Hall demolition, St. Thomas has put together an excellent plan for a STEAM complex designed to attract a fantastic and diverse set of candidates to St. Thomas. Their design is environmentally friendly, well done, and in line with the type of 21st century education that we should be supporting. In addition, St. Thomas makes excellent points about the limit in using old buildings and designs to facilitate engineering and science classrooms, and the limits of ADA compliance in retrofitting a building to attach to the old Loras Hall that meets today's requirements (i.e. the floors would not match up, for example). I do not think it is particularly valuable for members of the community to second guess the excellent engineering and design work when it is clear from presentations that the complex UST has designed is ideal to meet their purposes and to provide an optimal educational environment for future generations of engineers, scientists, and thought leaders.

More than that, however, the deep dive we've taken into Loras Hall has convinced me that it is simply not worth of historic preservation at the expense of such an educational purpose. I love Cass Gilbert - the Minnesota Supreme Courtroom in the Capitol is gorgeous and a fine example of his work. Loras Hall is not. It is the last of three buildings - the other two of which have already been torn down, meaning that we wouldn't even be preserving it in a historically accurate manner - that has been a working building for a century, with changes over time rightfully made to meet the needs of students. It does not have adequate bathroom facilities; it would need intensive work to restore it; it was built by Gilbert at the behest of James J. Hill and it's not even clear that Gilbert himself considered it emblematic of his style or anything other than a job done at the direction of a wealthy client. We have excellent examples of Cass Gilbert's work in St. Paul; we do not need this nondescript building that is only minorly viewable and that prevents the land around it from being used in an efficient fashion to aid students.

I served as the PTA president of Randolph Heights Elementary during the time period where RHS celebrated its centennial, and chaired the centennial celebration committee. I love St. Paul's historic buildings and I am fully aware and agree that stakeholders need to be consulted about the natural environment and buildings that become neighborhood institutions (like Randolph Heights!). But during that period the facilities team at SPPS gave a presentation on updates they were planning for various buildings and they mentioned something that has really stuck with me. When designing a school building for use by actual students and then updating that building, best practice is to update the building in line with modern design standards, because the function of the space is always more important than the aesthetics. Of course you should preserve the aesthetic and historic resources when you can, but the ability of students to use the space NOW is more important than the ability of nonstudents to observe and live in the presence of the space. That seems to be the exact lesson we should be taking from Loras Hall. St. Thomas has done a study and examined the options and Loras Hall

does not meet the needs of their students, and it is not a reasonable use of college dollars to fix it to make a subpar learning environment rather than build the complex that would best serve UST students. We should support that decision.

In addition, as St. Thomas now recognizes, Loras Hall is now named after a person who enslaved others. Requiring the building to be preserved even when St. Thomas would like to tear it down in order to facilitate its ever more diverse incoming classes sends a signal of the exact type of divisive nostalgia that the HPC discussed in August. Loras Hall is not an architectural gem whose magnificence will be lost to the annals of history. It is a nondescript dorm, built by an otherwise impressive architect, that has been underutilized for decades, named to honor a person who enslaved others. Allowing it to be torn down is an action towards anti-racism and towards building a future we can all be proud of.

Thanks for your time,
Kate Baxter-Kauf
(1739 Palace, 55105)



December 10th, 2020

Mr. George Gause
Heritage Preservation Supervisor
City of St. Paul
25 W 4th St., Suite #1400
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mr. Gause and Members of the Heritage Preservation Commission:

The **Undergraduate Student Government (USG)** at the University of St. Thomas urges you to support the permit application to demolish Loras Hall. As the governing body of the St. Thomas undergraduate student population, USG is comprised of 40 representatives dedicated to advocating student concerns by working with faculty, staff, the administration, community leaders, and fellow students to promote positive change.

Your support will be the first step toward building a world-class STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) complex that will provide incredible benefits to future students of St. Thomas.

As you can imagine, students attending college are very concerned with how tuition dollars are spent. Without your approval of the demolition permit, student tuition dollars will most likely be used to renovate Loras Hall. Because the building's configuration is so limited, this investment would be of little or no use to students.

In contrast, the STEAM complex will help St. Thomas students directly and will help us achieve two important goals, issues that are of the utmost importance to students at St. Thomas:

- 1. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**– A top priority with the building of this complex and growing these programs is to continue to diversify St. Thomas STEAM programs and provide an atmosphere where students of all backgrounds are encouraged and enabled to learn. Our current engineering program is among the top 10 engineering programs in the country for the number of women engineering faculty. The building will be designed to be an inclusive space, welcoming students and faculty from all backgrounds.



- 2. Sustainability-** Students at St. Thomas take protecting our Earth for future generations very seriously. The Undergraduate Student Government recently passed a Zero-Waste Resolution advocating for improved sustainability practices within the university. While Loras Hall is extremely inefficient in energy use, the STEAM building will be LEED-certified. As St. Thomas replaces an energy-inefficient Loras and a parking lot with a LEED-certified building and green space, we will become a more sustainable campus. This is in line with our first-ever sustainability strategic plan to embed sustainability practices and education throughout campus and to become carbon neutral by 2035.

Students at St. Thomas are also very concerned about the history of Loras Hall and its namesake. St. Thomas learned this summer that Bishop Mathias Loras was a slave owner. The university is confronting this disturbing issue by creating a renaming committee and involving the community in many conversations to understand and learn from our history. We believe that Loras Hall's namesake does not represent the University of St. Thomas. It is important to learn from our past but to not be wedded to buildings or names that no longer represent who we are. We strongly believe that it is important to move forward and focus on a brighter future for students.

We hope that the City of St. Paul will realize the benefits to future generations that come with this project. We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

The Undergraduate Student Government, University of St. Thomas

Dear Mr. Gause and members of the Heritage Preservation Commission,

I am writing you to voice my support of the proposed demolition of Loras Hall and University of St. Thomas' (UST) proposed new Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math facility.

At the October 28th meeting of the Macalester-Groveland Community Council's Housing/Land-Use committee meeting, there was thorough review of the benefits/costs of the proposals, a supportive description of the historical context building and its famed architect. After the meeting, I came away with the following opinions:

- The Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math (STEAM) facility represents a wise investment in our city's future. With its unique design it will improve UST's ability to recruit a more diverse student body.
- With a more diverse and inclusive learning environment, this facility will increase the number of diverse and underrepresented professionals working in our area. This diverse workforce will provide long-term growth in our economy and improve equity in our community.
- The new structure represents a significant improvement in energy efficiency and it will align with the city's 2040 environmental goals.
- Despite its renowned architect, Loras Hall is not a landmark building and it provides very little lasting benefit to UST's students or our community.

In closing, I believe the best direction for our community, UST's students and our environment is to approve the demolition of Loras Hall and proceed with the STEAM project.

Sincerely,
Art Punyko
1463 Grand Ave, St Paul, MN 55105

13 December 2020

To: Mr. George Gause
Heritage Preservation Supervisor, City of Saint Paul
Heritage Preservation Commission
25 West Fourth Street, Suite 1400
Saint Paul, MN 55105-1089
george.gause@stpaul.gov

From: Craig Skone, Macalester-Groveland Resident

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

Dear Mr. Gause and Members of the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission:

I must start this testimony by stating that I fully support the University of St. Thomas in its endeavor to construct the STEAM building. I also must state that I believe that it is important to preserve our historical, cultural and architectural heritage, but only if the results are functional, sustainable structures.

Due to its structural peculiarities, Loras Hall cannot reasonably be converted to a use other than small offices or dormitory rooms. As I understand, the interior of the building cannot be altered to create larger, more usable spaces without compromising or eliminating its structural integrity. It was designed and built for a specific purpose, just as the Minnesota State Capitol was designed and built for a specific purpose – a purpose for which it is still used today and, hopefully, for generations to come. The Capitol was designed as the grand seat of state government; Loras Hall was designed as a dormitory. Its usefulness is rapidly waning.

To be honest, until the University filed for a demolition permit for Loras Hall, I had never heard of it, or seen it. Upon doing a Google Street View (dated June 2019), I saw a utilitarian-looking building with window A/C units in every-other window. That is grossly inefficient. I can only imagine that winter heating of the building is equally inefficient. Loras Hall is unsustainable. Its environmental footprint has to be enormous with few viable options to shrink it.

Preservation should be based on the following criteria at a minimum: 1) historical significance, 2) architectural significance, 3) cultural significance, 4) future usefulness, and 5) future sustainability. The more of these criteria that are met, the greater the case for preservation. As far as I am concerned, Loras Hall meets one of these criteria, that of historical significance. Though the architect is well-known, architecturally it is not a gem. Bland is a word that comes to mind. As such, this seems to me to be a case of a push for preservation solely for the sake of preservation. If a lesser-known, or unknown architect had designed Loras Hall, would we even be having this conversation? Cass Gilbert designed many magnificent structures, but Loras Hall is not one of them.

As I have previously stated, I am in favor of preserving the best of the best - especially if the structures can be properly maintained and remain functional and sustainable without astronomical financial outlays. At some point, however, as technology advances, some structures are going to fall by the wayside. If we insist on preserving everything based solely on perceived historic value, we will at some point in the future be flooded with buildings that are historically significant, but structurally, functionally and sustainably obsolete. And, possibly, vacant. When considering preservation, you cannot consider only the past and present – you must also take into consideration the future.

Sincerely,
Craig Skone
1960 James Av.
St. Paul, MN 55105
skone@q.com