

I'm asking the St Paul HPC support the Mac Groveland Community Council recommendation: "supporting the University of St Thomas's plan to remove Loras Hall so that the new STEAM Building can be built on the site".

1. The MGCC represents the community where the proposed change would take place. Further, UST makes a compelling case the "optimum use" the property is constructing a STEAM building for a diverse student population. The wishes of the community and the property owner should carry strong weight..

2. J.J. Hill "was intimately involved with Gilbert and Archbishop Ireland in working out nearly every aspect of the design and construction of the seminary. [It may not be] possible to determine how much .. Loras Hall is attributable to Gilbert's design sensibilities and how much was dictated by Hill. Gilbert despised the experience of working with Hill. Never again, he vowed, would he be coerced into subservience by a powerful client".

ref: UST, Seminary, and Historic Summit Ave: Assessment of Cultural Resources p.34.

The preservation of Loras Hall does NOT honor Cass Gilbert. Rather, it perpetuates a building design imposed by a powerful, wealthy and elite white man. In short, not a structure worthy of preservation....

3. "Preservation can be essentially an elitist, class, and racially divisive activity whose result is a form of economic bias and segregation. History sites can perpetuate a divisive form of nostalgia that supports and validates racism and exclusion."

ref: <https://twistedpreservation.com/2020/06/02/systemic-racism-of-preservation/>

I'm asking the St Paul HPC respect broader community wishes and demonstrate it's commitment to equity and social justice..

Thank you for listening,
Jack Fei
1359 Sargent Avenue
St Paul, Mn 55105

Saura Jost
St. Paul, MN 55105

December 8, 2020

Mr. George Gause
Heritage Preservation Supervisor
City of Saint Paul
Heritage Preservation Commission
25 West 4th Street, Suite #1400
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Re: Support for University of St. Thomas STEAM Building and demolition of Loras Hall

Dear Mr. Gause,

My name is Saura Jost, and I am a long-time resident of the Macalester Groveland neighborhood. I also currently serve as a representative on the Macalester Groveland Community Council Board where I have heard the presentations by the University of St. Thomas (UST) regarding this project at our board and Housing and Land Use (HLU) Committee meetings. I am writing this letter to support the University of St. Thomas STEAM Building project understanding that fulfilling the design intent and needs of the campus would result in the demolition of the existing building, Loras Hall. I write this letter not only as a resident, but also as a licensed structural engineer in the commercial building industry, an educator in this field (adjunct instructor at the U of MN College of Design), a board member of a mentoring organization in the building industry for high school students and having had the experience as an engineering student at two universities.

In reviewing the documents provided by the design professionals, it is apparent, based on their feasibility study of the five options, that demolishing Loras Hall is the best solution from an economic, environmental, sustainability, and long-term planning standpoint. The documents note the repair needed to the architectural envelope and HVAC systems that would need to be upgraded to be more energy efficient. In addition, the structural engineering recommendation noted challenges for re-locating the building and an existing structure that would require significant modifications to increase the open space for a new program. While Loras Hall could be renovated and restored in these aspects, this would result in a high cost (preliminary estimate of \$10 million) for UST and would take away from the monetary resources and square footage for new construction thus taking away from a better experience for the students. In past renovations of existing buildings, I have worked on, I am reminded that, in addition to our architecture and owner clients, the building itself is our client. As a result, the freedom of our design is at the will of the building in every aspect. For this building, the report notes the existing floor to floor heights of Loras Hall, for example, are not favorable for the new desired floor heights of the STEAM building. This is one example of how the building restricts the design and is not in favor of the goals for the new construction. Overall, I think that the design team and UST have done their due diligence in exhausting all options to keep Loras Hall, and we should trust their professional expertise and recommendations to demolish it.

While Loras Hall is a Cass Gilbert design and part of the Historic St. Paul Seminary, the documents provided (UST Demo Application 11-06-2020) indicate that the building lacked historical significance for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility, and it was also unclear how much influence James J. Hill may have had on Cass Gilbert's design. There are many historic buildings where the financial cost to restore such buildings is warranted based on its historic significance. When substantial resources are put towards keeping a historic building, it is usually because its historic significance and the desire for it to remain in the community far outweigh the loss of the building. Some recent projects come to mind: Northrup Memorial Auditorium, Pioneer Endicott, and Pioneer Hall (U of MN). However, Loras Hall, which currently serves as an office building, does not appear to be one of those buildings. In addition, it was recently discovered that Bishop Loras was a slave owner and used his slave profits toward his future projects, which brings to light an unfavorable historical significance of this building. This negative historic significance that Bishop Loras and the building represent may even outweigh the small amount of historic significance the building was evaluated to have.

Lastly, the potential opportunities for UST students, their educational experience, and the science and engineering industry should be the primary focus as the STEAM building will be built to serve them. UST has been working towards expanding its engineering program, and, to stay competitive in recruiting students to choose UST, it needs to provide a world class experience. The STEAM project is also important for the professional industry because some areas of engineering have seen a decline in enrollment over the past decade. Providing upgraded classroom space and a unique experience is imperative in keeping the next generation engaged in engineering professions. It is also important to provide the students with the tools and curriculum they need to be successful beyond their education in their future careers. UST is planning to house a variety of majors within this building with most of the square footage dedicated to engineering and science. In contrast, a larger University may have the space and resources to provide a building for each major. Therefore, reducing the square footage of the new building by even 5-10%, as recommended by some of the alternative options or moving the square footage into the less favorable, Loras Hall, may cut out significant opportunities for an entire major. Many majors need lab classrooms, large scale testing facilities, and the latest technology to learn and remain competitive. There is also potential for elementary and high school students in the community to take advantage of the spaces and learn more about potential careers. This provides a community aspect to the new construction that Loras Hall does not currently have. Therefore, I think that keeping Loras Hall does not best serve the students as it would take away from the potential for their education and hinder growth for the STEM industry.

In summary, the evaluation and report provided by UST shows that there are more reasons to support demolishing Loras Hall than to keep it. Demolishing this building and upgrading the space in its place will keep the University, industry, and neighborhood moving towards the future.

Sincerely,



Saura Jost

Please note that this is a personal opinion and is not a professional engineering recommendation or an opinion of the Macalester Groveland Community Council.



December 7, 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:

On behalf of the University of St. Thomas Board of Trustees, we urge you to approve the St. Thomas application before you for a demolition permit for Loras Hall. Your approval will ensure that we are prudently investing our students' tuition dollars and limited donor funds to directly benefit our current and future students, an investment that will provide important benefits to the St. Paul community.

As you will read in the application, St. Thomas is preparing to build a state-of-the-art STEAM building (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) on our south campus in proximity to our existing science and engineering buildings. This complex, built in this location, will ensure that St. Thomas can serve students in growing, high-demand fields, such as health care, engineering and other sciences; and diversify these fields as we intentionally welcome more students and faculty of diverse backgrounds. St. Thomas has hired Robert A.M. Stern Architects (RAMSA), a world-renown architect, as the design architect.

Our priority for this project is to prepare more young people for the jobs of tomorrow by providing collaborative educational experiences that employers value. The building will allow for interdisciplinary education that will attract top-talent students and faculty to St. Paul from around the country. Equally important to St. Thomas is building a complex that will help us increase the number of women and people of color in STEAM fields as our programs grow.

This building provides a tremendous opportunity not just for St. Thomas, but it meets many shared goals of the City of St. Paul. We are excited that the new space will allow our engineering and arts programs to collaborate with public and private K-12 programs and offer performance and gathering spaces that neighbors, community leaders and nonprofits can enjoy. Additional green space will benefit neighbors and those who travel through campus for recreation. Our goals for the complex align with goals stated in the St. Paul 2040 Comprehensive Plan:

-Resiliency. The complex will focus on sustainability strategies by replacing an incredible energy-inefficient building with a LEED-certified building that follows green building standards. The complex will help us reduce our carbon footprint.

-Urban design. Our goal has been to ensure efficient use of our space on campus. Given the limits placed on St. Thomas through the Conditional Use Permit, it is vitally important that we plan development within our campus in a way that as the 2040 plan states, "fosters activity, connection, beauty, safety, and economic value." Policies in the 2040 document speak to the need to use land and public infrastructure more efficiently by increasing densities on infill parcels.


- **Fostering the next generation.** The 2040 plan states, "If a city is going to grow, innovate and prosper, it must provide opportunities for its youth to grow, innovate and prosper. The same physical systems that need to accommodate an aging population need to accommodate a young population. This is especially important in the areas of education and employment and innovation."

As we invest in this complex, or in any major project, we have the utmost responsibility to ensure that any dollar spent is maximized to directly benefit our current and future students. Preliminary estimates indicate that it would cost nearly \$10 million to rehabilitate and repurpose Loras Hall. Even with that investment, the building's configuration limits its usefulness and a rehabilitated Loras Hall would not benefit our students. As fiscal stewards of the university, we cannot justify spending donor or student tuition dollars on a building that does not further our educational mission.

The University of St. Thomas greatly respects the history that has shaped the development of its campuses and the City of St. Paul. We are proud to anchor beautiful, historic Summit Avenue and appreciate its tradition and beauty. We have invested and will continue to invest in valued historic buildings on our campus. However, as an educational institution, we must balance historic preservation with the primary educational needs of our community.

Thank you for your service to St. Paul and for your attention to this matter. Please know that your approval will ensure that investment in our STEAM complex enhances the education of our students and contributes to the long-term goals of the City of St. Paul.

Sincerely,



Julie H. Sullivan, Ph.D.
President
University of St. Thomas



Pat Ryan
Chair of the Board of Trustees

cc: Mayor Melvin Carter
Jaime Tincher, Chief of Staff, City of St. Paul
Councilmember Mitra Jalali
Josh Williams, City of St. Paul
Tia Anderson, Principal City Planner, City of St. Paul