

Wagner, David B

From: Debra Harlan <debraandted@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, November 28, 2016 9:45 AM
To: Wagner, David B
Subject: Tremont
Attachments: Tremont.pdf

Mr Wagner, please find attached comments pertinent to the pending meeting tomorrow regarding the Bishop Smith house. If this format will not open, please advise and I can resend in Word.

I would appreciate confirmation of receipt at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully ,
DRH

Sent from my iPad

An Inconvenient Truth

I write in Support of the Landmarks designation of 2833 Tremont and in opposition to the notion that any Landmark designation requires oversight by Metro Council in the first place. My name is Debra Richards Harlan, I reside in the Highlands, and have worked in historic preservation and neighborhood redevelopment and local commercial corridor economic revitalization for forty years, including 25 years as design staff to the Landmarks Commission. I have participated in many designations, including whole districts of Butchertown and Clifton, and I continue to consult independent developers citywide on issues of historic house revitalization, small business development, and infill development. Finally, I am a professional colorist whose work has been visible throughout this community over a span of 20-plus years.

The findings of fact of this designation stand on their own merit. The Landmarks process was developed as a public grassroots effort that has been seriously and egregiously eroded by the insertion of what I term "emperors mandate", where true historic buildings such as the Water Co. Block are tossed into dumpsters and boxes at midnight while our leadership toys with "emergency demolitions" that are not emergencies, and decisions are made in back rooms by persons woefully unequipped to make those decisions . This is a far cry from what the public mandate was as directed by Mayor Sloane, who rightly saw the future of our city being deeply compromised by the aftermath of Urban Renewal and urban blight.

As we have recently witnessed nationwide, (as well as in Louisville with the removal of a piece of Civil War history for no real reason other than the need for a turn lane), failure to understand and respect history - especially the history of evil- has created an unsettling repeat of hate and divisiveness. We are again in a "civil war" that will be anything but civil. History cannot teach if cleansed and removed.

The Tremont property represents the significant contributions of a significant person in our history, who made many of those contributions on the landmark site. Would the public response to the proposed demolition be any more clear had it been the Grand Avenue home of Muhammad Ali, a site which should also be landmarked, not because of the per se significance of the architecture, but because of its significance in local, national and African-American history?

I have worked with hundreds of landmarked sites and in most every case exterior changes and improvements are routinely approved. In my forty years I have never encountered a client who purchased a property of significant cost and then suddenly found themselves "burdened" by the unworkability of the property after purchase to the

point that they would actually consider demolition. This case represents a "tear down" mindset from the beginning with intent to subdivide and replace the landmark site with ubiquitous houses. Nobody pays that high an amount for a house only to determine it cannot possibly be put to any productive use. Given the current propensity for tear downs in the area, the intent seems clear. And the irony is the site is large enough the owners may still build upon the site without harming the landmark house and site. There are many many people who know how to hire an architect to design within the parameters of design review. We've been doing that successfully until the recent concerted efforts to undermine what has brought great renown to our city - our historic integrity and great wealth of historic structures.

The Bourbon Trail doesn't ramble through subdivisions, strip malls, and big box hotels. Tourists do not book tours of the Polo Fields or Norton Commons. And speaking of same and the non-issue of "property rights", many home buyers sign up each and every day in these "gated by income" communities where deed restrictions will regulate everything down to the color and type of your mailbox.

The Landmarks designation and the rights of the public to mandate same are legal and appropriate, and those making the decision are qualified professionals, well versed in the work. One Commissioner is also retired Landmarks staff and wrote countless designation reports and national register designations over a span of 25 years. She would have been the first to point out any flaws in the process. The district Councilperson is himself in favor of the designation and has an extensive background in local history.

When Mayor Sloane found himself between two vacant historic mansions and the classic surface parking lot dilemma in 1978, he did not turn his back upon the Victorian local preservation district and his own home neighborhood. He did not turn responsibility over to the Board of Aldermen. He boldly enacted eminent domain in a legal taking to prevent demolition of what would become known as The Woman's Club houses . And today both houses remain - restored, engaged, occupied. That is the essence of public service. The public has spoken and performed their due diligence. Do not overturn the Landmark designation of the Bishop Smith house. It was and is worthy of this protection!

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Richards Harlan
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