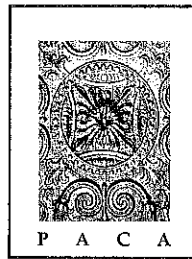


Chris Kloeppe
Board President
Unit 4 School District
703 South New Street
Champaign, IL 61820-5818



Dear Mr. Kloeppe:

We, the members of the Preservation and Conservation Association's Board of Directors, are writing in response to your letter dated July 20, 2016 regarding properties the District has optioned in the vicinity of Central High School.

The Board would first like to thank you for keeping us informed of your plans for this project and your stated desire to take our interests into account. We are very pleased to hear that the District has prioritized the preservation of the existing Central High building, as it is a significant historic structure and an important part of its historic old-town neighborhood.

As you are no doubt aware, however, PACA sees an inherent contradiction in the fact that the district assumes that nine other historic structures must be sacrificed in order for this one building to continue to be useful. Before we proceed to any discussion about the fate of the optioned properties, we want to be very clear that PACA does not accept your stated plan as the only or even the most practical means for resolving the question of how to redevelop Central High School. In other words, our willingness to discuss this subject is not an offer of support for, nor an endorsement of the District's plans as they have been presented to us. We intend to continue searching for and encouraging others to join us in finding more favorable solutions.

As we understand your letter, the District seems to be indicating that, if the referendum is successful (and perhaps even if it is not), the District intends to purchase and demolish the nine optioned buildings located at 201 and 203 N. Lynn; 606 W. Park; 500, 602, 603, 606 and 615 W. Church; and 605 W. Hill. Your assumption appears to be that the current structures are of no possible use to you, but that the land itself — on account of its proximity to the existing high school building — will sooner or later be required for school expansion, green space, parking lots, or some other purpose. This practice is generally referred to as "land banking," and it raises important questions:

- Is the recently developed plan to update and expand the existing Central High the only one the District intends to pursue regardless of the outcome of the proposed referendum? Will you pursue it even if the referendum fails?
- Can you offer some assurance that demolition will only be undertaken as a last resort, so as to take into account the possibility that reduced funding or unforeseen circumstances may necessitate a rethinking of the initial design plans at some later date?

Once a property has been demolished, it cannot be resurrected. There are some occasions where removing blighted or unused/unusable buildings can provide a safer and more cost-effective option over the long term than continuing to maintain them. In this case, however, there is no justifiable reason to destroy well-kept and fully tenanted buildings, historic or not, simply because you may possibly have some use for that property at some point.

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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You have stated your interest in promoting preservation by offering to allow us (or some other similarly interested organization) the opportunity to move some or all of the listed structures to new locations and/or salvage any usable architectural materials from those that cannot be moved. You also express a willingness to contribute funds comparable to the cost of demolition for this purpose. We appreciate that offer.

However, you are presumably aware that, first and foremost, moving most of these buildings would remove them from their original context and begin unraveling what binds together the historic aspects of the neighborhood surrounding Central High. Maintaining historic structures in their original locations respects the fact that integrity of location is inherent in a building's history, along with the larger sense of place and unique character that it helps to create in its neighborhood. Acknowledging and protecting this broader context is a fundamental principle of preservation practice, from the national level on down.

With that in mind, and before any plan to move or salvage these buildings takes place, professional documentation of these buildings in situ should be undertaken to record for posterity each of the nine buildings, individually and in the context of its neighbors. PACA recommends that this be done according to Historic American Building Survey (HABS) standards. We would be happy to put the District in contact with appropriate individuals for this kind of work, and we strongly suggest that it begin as soon as is practicable.

If moving buildings is considered, in spite of the above principle, we must all recognize the great deal of collaborative preparation necessary to relocating structures of this size. Engineers would need full access as soon as possible in order to assess structural integrity and make the necessary drawings and measurements. Given the obstacles to moving structures through town, it would be extremely helpful if the District were to collaborate with PACA on this process rather than simply turning it over to us. City permits, cooperation from utility providers, and locating and preparing available lots are key to making an undertaking of this sort possible, and those things would be far easier if the District were to partner with us throughout the process.

Finally, in order to accomplish either the moving of any of these houses or the salvaging of usable materials, time is of the essence. The more time available, the more likely it is that either of these jobs can be done properly. To that end, it would be very important to open a direct line of communication with you so that we can know what is possible and when.

In closing, we wish to reiterate that, ideally, all of these buildings can and will be saved. If that proves impossible, then the first option should be moving them. Only if all else fails should demolition be considered, and not until after they are thoroughly documented and completely salvaged. If we can at least agree on this hierarchy, then the PACA Board feels that we have the basis for future discussions on this subject, and we'd be glad to explore the possibilities with you.

Sincerely,

The PACA Board of Directors
P. O. Box 2575
Champaign, IL 61825