

To the Special Facilities Committee:

Since 1981 the Preservation and Conservation Association has worked in the community to protect and preserve our irreplaceable architectural heritage, and to educate people about the importance of keeping still usable items out of our landfills.

When plans for a new Central High School were presented last year, PACA joined with neighbors and community groups to advocate for retention and upgrading of the existing historic Central High building, and so I'm happy to be able to come here tonight and participate in this discussion about the various ways that this can be achieved, and I want to thank the members of this committee for their efforts to preserve this historic local landmark.

Yet I'm also well aware, as I'm sure you all are, that we wouldn't be here having this conversation if it weren't for the overwhelming response of the community who came together and voted unequivocally in favor of preserving this building.

Those who sought to create an entirely new school on the edge of town didn't sufficiently value the long history of Central High and its place as an integral component of the community, they opted instead to just start over somewhere else from scratch, but the community felt otherwise, and that proposal was soundly defeated.

It puzzles me therefore, that despite having been presented with a very clear popular mandate in favor of preservation, some of the plans being advanced here seem to either be predicated on the idea that this desire to preserve only applied to the school building itself -- and that the community has no further interest in its history or the integrity of its neighborhoods -- or else a complete misunderstanding of what the people were saying that they wanted with that vote.

So we should be very clear about this. When the people of this community voted to reject the idea of abandoning the current Central High in favor of a new facility at the edge of town, they weren't concerned solely with the inconvenience of having to drive a few miles away to some remote location, they were also clearly saying that history matters, that place matters, and so any plans for renovation of the current site need to take this fact into account not only in terms of what changes are made to the current building, but also how any plans for expansion affect the rest of the neighborhood.

The desire to save the existing Central High wasn't just a love for the building itself, in isolation, it was also a regard for how that building fit into its surroundings, and how its presence completes the neighborhood, so it makes no sense to save just that one building at the expense of everything else around it.

This committee must, therefore, take into account the other important features of the neighborhood that contribute to its historic character and identity if they are to fully comply with the mandate they've been given to save this important local landmark. To that end PACA would be very happy to work with this committee in order to help them identify the other important houses and buildings in the neighborhood so that a well rounded plan can be crafted that will allow for expansion of the current site without also decimating the surrounding area in the process.

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Preservation and Conservation Association