

Elsen, Nikki

From: Laura Godden <lgodden@uwlax.edu>
Sent: Thursday, July 13, 2023 5:38 PM
To: zzcouncil@cityoflacrosse.org
Cc: Reynolds, Mitch; Elsen, Nikki
Subject: Support for Lincoln historic designation

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Hello, La Crosse City Council members,

I am writing today to express my support for the historic designation of Lincoln (510 9th Street South), as the building helps connect the city to its past, still has plenty of life left in it, and showcases the work of one of La Crosse's finest architects, Otto Merman. Our city is lucky to have this fine physical landmark designed by a very talented individual. Lincoln's historic designation is a practical and effective way to draw attention to the building's value and honor Merman's legacy and community contributions. Additionally, enhancing our historic register also strengthens local history knowledge, interest, and community pride. While it is easy to get distracted by the unfitting additions added to the building over the years, they should not derail us from seeing the core structure's value.

As the oldest, continuous school location in the city, Lincoln is not only an anchor in the neighborhood, but also in the larger community, and it should be treated with the dignity it deserves by being repurposed. As the 2017 renovation of Roosevelt Elementary shows, the conversion of former educational facilities into housing is a sensible way to retain neighborhood character while still advancing current needs. Moreover, repurposing is both environmentally and fiscally sound, and it is what's best for the neighborhood long term, as it would be nearly impossible for any new construction to even come close to matching the quality and potential longevity of the old due to how much it would cost in today's world. This is why new buildings, sadly, just don't hold up as well over the years. Almost everyday, I notice that there are clusters of once shiny and prized (yet characterless) new construction (as recent as the 1990s and 2000s) that now look considerably more dilapidated and rundown than even the city's oldest residences.

Unfortunately, many have the impression that historic designation comes along with a myriad of unreasonable restrictions, but that actually isn't the case. State and national listing places no restrictions or requirements on private property owners who may still do whatever they wish within local ordinances. Our city's local rules only require that owners go before the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) in the case of meaningful exterior alterations or demolition. In cases of disagreement, appeals can be made to the city council, but, as you all know, that hardly ever happens despite the city's several historic districts and numerous designated sites, which speaks to the program's success and non-onerous nature.

Personally, I can't think of any example of an historic building being preserved that the community regretted saving. However, I can think of several examples of buildings that were torn down that are now considered great community losses (the old post office, public library, courthouse, Cargill mansion, Michel Brewery, Eastman house, Stoddard Hotel, former Central High School, and countless others).

If anything, historic designation draws attention to the building's significance, quality construction, and potential eligibility for historic preservation tax credits and is a possible financial asset for a new owner. Furthering the historic designation of the building could result in an even more substantial investment in our community at this site through state and federal historic tax credits, like what is currently happening with the former Holy Trinity

school and Fire Station No. 5 (https://www.news8000.com/news/education/old-la-crosse-fire-station-no-5-climbs-ladder-to-state-register-of-historic-places/article_c08a9223-8da8-5905-94ff-c7b6027ca4b8.html).

- Wisconsin Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program: For incoming-producing buildings, the program returns 20 percent of the cost of rehabilitating historic buildings, up to \$3.5 million per parcel, to owners as a Wisconsin income tax credit, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15322>.
- Federal historic Preservation Tax Credit: Program returns 20 percent of the cost of rehabilitating historic buildings to owners as a federal income tax credit, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/index.htm>.

Just this past June, the National Trust for Historic Preservation released a report outlining the positive economic impacts, community investments, environmental benefits, and affordable housing gains fostered through state historic tax credits,

https://cdn.savingplaces.org/2023/06/29/12/21/44/12/NTHP86_2023_AffHousing-Climate_F.pdf.

Moreover, the city made a substantial investment in the modernization of Lincoln from 1983 to 1988, when the entire school was completely renovated with new mechanicals, windows, lights, ceilings, bathrooms, and more, and all asbestos was removed. In light of this, I think it is even more reasonable for the community to insist that the building remains in existence, so we can continue to fully realize the benefits of those taxpayer dollars.

Cultural and historic assets are a significant part of the community's heritage, educational opportunities, and social and economic prosperity. Preservation fosters civic pride, encourages architectural and neighborhood beauty, highlights past accomplishments, and reminds ourselves, neighbors, and visitors of our community's distinctive heritage. And, although the city still retains a number of exceptional sites, every year they shrink in number. In my opinion, it would be a travesty to add Lincoln to the list of lost assets. I truly believe that the city's historic character makes La Crosse the unique and special place it is.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Laura Godden



Laura Godden, MA, MLIS

Assistant Professor // Historian // Archivist

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library

Special Collections / Area Research Center (SC/ARC)

1631 Pine Street | La Crosse, Wisconsin, 54601 | Rm #155

lgodden@uwlax.edu | 608.785.8511 | PGPs:

she/hers/they/them

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