

Proposed Project 121, 123, and 127 West Gilman

The testimony of Frederic E. Mohs, Madison Landmarks Commission
12/25/13

My position is that the demolition of 121 West Gilman Street is appropriate, but that the demolition and/or moving of contributing buildings at 123 and 127 West Gilman Street should not be approved.

The two houses, 123 and 127 West Gilman Street, now before Landmarks Commission, are a test of whether or not the Landmark Ordinance is serious in its intent, and if it will remain worthy of the confidence that many people, including and especially people who have purchased properties in the Mansion Hill Historic District have placed in it over the past 40 years. Additionally, and if we need to, we will settle whether or not building owners can use a strategy of demolition by neglect and profit by it.

Shortly after the Landmarks Ordinance was passed, a handbook "The Mansion Hill Historic District Preservation Plan and Development Handbook" was produced by the Department of Planning. It contained information about the houses in the Mansion Hill Historic District with information about who lived in them and when. Importantly, starting at page 18 of the handbook presented guidelines for development. Thereafter followed specific examples of the standards that could be used to rebuild in the event properties in the district were destroyed by fire. Two of Gene Devitt's mansions at the corner of East Gilman and North Pinckney, Ledell's house at 510 North Carroll and the Quisling Clinic Building were all used as examples.

The proposed project totally ignores the directions and standards that owners of property in the Mansion Hill Historic District have been relying upon for almost 40 years. We all have a copy of this handbook and this is what we expect. None of us should have to fear that adjoining properties will be collected so that demolition will be permitted or that the contributing building next door can be moved. We cannot expect people to commit if the City does not commit.

I want to speak specifically about 127 West Gilman Street. As far as I know, it has never been painted over the last 19 years. It became obvious long ago that Steve Brown considered it a development site and he said so. Building orders were postponed year after year, and the undergrounding of utilities scheduled for last year on West Gilman Street has been postponed pending his new development. Steve has also talked about demolishing the grey stone house at the southeast corner of North Carroll Street and West Gilman Street stating that it had a large lot and was not a good use of the space. The bottom line is that Steve doesn't see the historic district the way the rest of us do. There is a whole town who would just love to have a nice building with a big underground parking garage in it built in their neighborhood, but the Mansion Hill Historic District just isn't one of them.

Next, I would like to mention something about the engineering report with which you have been provided. This is a perfect example of what one can expect when the preparer of the report knows that you want a building to be demolished. He takes advantage of 19 years of neglect and deferred maintenance and concludes not that the building cannot be repaired, but that it would just cost more than he would recommend.

This reminds me of my experience at the Olin House. If you will permit me, Campus Planning was considering whether or not to build a new residence for the Chancellor on Second Point with a large parking lot and other amenities that would make entertaining easier. The plan was to demolish the Olin House and either subdivide the several lots upon which it was built or sell to a hotel developer. I am not kidding.

A committee was formed, of which I was a member. We were furnished with a study by Key Architects that had reached the conclusion that Olin House was so far gone that it really couldn't be saved. The concept of putting in an elevator was said to be virtually impossible unless an adjoining silo would be constructed with an entrance through the dining room.

The committee had a meeting with the architects who explained their report. The report concluded that the windows all needed replacement because they were so far gone and that the heating and ventilating system needed to be replaced, etc. I went to one of the windows and said, "Let's go over and look at these windows and see what we have here. Look at these windows, they are perfect. These are first growth pine and they have been beautifully maintained. Look how nicely they go up and down. Now let's go over and look at another one. It is just the same. These windows are perfect. Now look at another one."

At this point, one of the architects from Key said, "Okay, we can stop this. The windows are fine. I give up on the windows." Eventually, Arlan Kay was hired to prepare a redevelopment plan. A new elevator was snugged right into the back hall area and the result is that magnificent Olin House that is there today. I am reciting this just to point out that one shouldn't take a report like this too seriously.

This is the time to get the fundamentals right. No destruction or moving of contributing buildings. There are solutions for what to do with the Highlander, but probably this is not the time to be talking about them.

MOHS, MACDONALD, WIDDER, PARADISE & VAN NOTE

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November 25, 2013

City of Madison Planning Commission
Madison Municipal Building
210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Suite LL 100
Madison, WI 53703

RE: Comparison between the Mansion Hill Historic District in Madison and the Lincoln Park Old Town Triangle in Chicago.

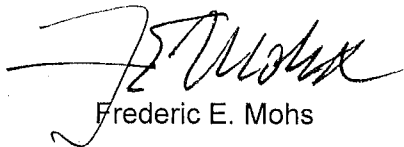
Dear Commissioner:

My daughter Nicki and her family live at 1816 North Lincoln Park West in the Old Town Triangle Historic District. Today, I asked her if she would go out and take some pictures of frame buildings in her neighborhood. The first, entitled "Renovated house a few doors down from me" shows a building with a tall front stairs which is typical of buildings in that neighborhood. For years this building sat unoccupied with its tar paper imitation brick peeling away. Finally, a family bought and virtually gutted the inside and made it their home. There were no questions. It was a contributing building and everyone knew the only thing that could happen to it was to have it be rehabbed. It was going to sit there until someone restored it.

The next picture is a modest house on an adjacent street with aluminum siding looking forlorn. The next one is a house next door that has been rehabilitated. These are frame buildings. They have foundation issues just like everywhere else. The next picture is of another building with aluminum siding and the ones next door that have been rehabilitated. All of these are modest properties that once they are rehabbed, are valuable and valued. By comparison, 123 and 127 West Gilman are palaces. They have spacious lawns and room for tons of parking and even space for garages. Why would we want either to be moved out of its context? What could possibly be better than these original buildings? It is okay to talk about moving buildings, but that should be the last, last resort. There is nothing about this situation that justifies destroying the original context.

Sincerely,

Mohs, MacDonald, Widder, Paradise & Van Note



Frederic E. Mohs

FEM: eeh
Enclosure

Erin Hunt

From: Nicki Yahoo <nicki_herbst@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2013 11:36 AM
To: Erin Hunt
Subject: 1806 Lincoln Park West
Attachments: photo.JPG

Renovated house a few doors down from me.





Erin Hunt

From: Nicki Yahoo <nicki_herbst@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2013 11:41 AM
To: Erin Hunt
Subject: Ugly house waiting to be restored on North Park
Attachments: photo.JPG



Erin Hunt

From: Nicki Yahoo <nicki_herbst@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2013 11:41 AM
To: Erin Hunt
Subject: The renovated house next to ugly house
Attachments: photo.JPG



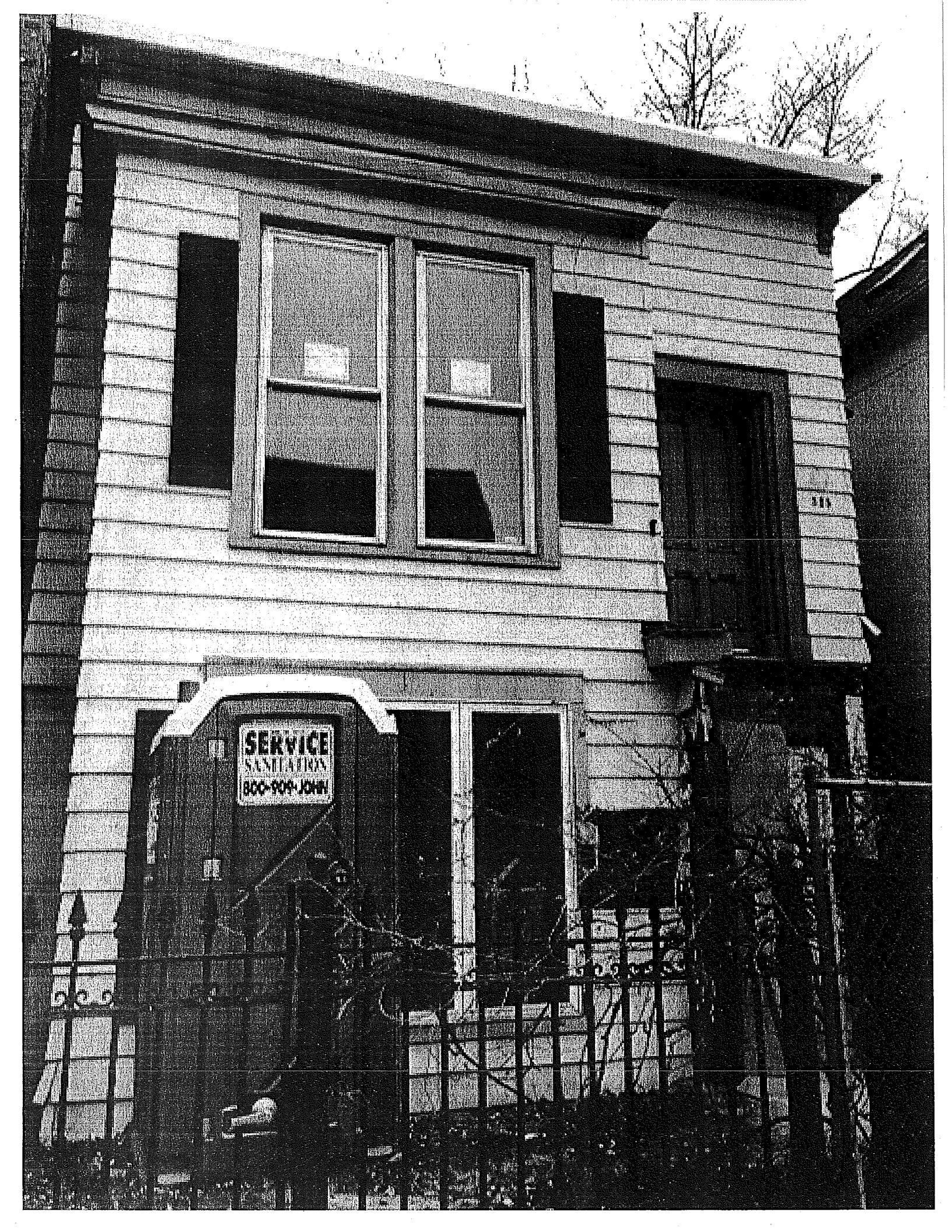
Erin Hunt

From: Nicki Yahoo <nicki_herbst@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2013 11:39 AM
To: Erin Hunt
Subject: 325 Menomonee
Attachments: photo.JPG

Wood and siding structure. Next door to two newly renovated houses.

SERVICE
SANTI ATRIS
800-909-JOHN

111





Erin Hunt

From: Nicki Yahoo <nicki_herbst@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2013 11:40 AM
To: Erin Hunt
Subject: Next door to 325. Newly renovated.
Attachments: photo.JPG

