

LANDMARKS COMMISSION MEETING REPORT

January 9, 2023



Agenda Item #: 3

Project Title: Review of Landmark Nomination for the Filene House (1617 Sherman Ave); 12th Ald. Dist.

Legistar File ID #: [75226](#)

Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner

Members: Present: Molly Harris, Katie Kaliszewski, David McLean, Maurice Taylor, and Ald. Bill Tishler.
Excused: Edna Ely-Ledesma. Richard Arnesen left the meeting during this item and did not participate in the vote.
Also present: Ald. Brian Benford

Summary

Bob Klebba, registering in support and wishing to speak
Amy Squitieri, registering in support and wishing to speak
Daniel Wiltrout, registering in support and wishing to speak
Kathryn Martin, registering in support and wishing to speak
John Rolling, registering in support and wishing to speak
Dave Grace, registering in support and wishing to speak
Andrea Janquart, registering in support and wishing to speak
Larry Nesper, registering in support and wishing to speak
Blake Alvarenga, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Josh Olson, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Robert Johnson, registering in support and wishing to speak [registered in opposition in error]
Mary Alice Wimmer, registering in support and wishing to speak
Blake Walter, registering in support and wishing to speak
Gary Tipler, registering in support and wishing to speak
Melissa Huggins, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Mary Ellen Spoerke, registering in support and wishing to speak
Kirk Biodrowski, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Matthew Havey, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Michael Bridgeman, registering in support and wishing to speak
Timothy Jones, registering in support and wishing to speak
Alex Saloutos, registering in support and wishing to speak
Kevin Revolinski, registering in support and wishing to speak
Ed Jordan, registering in support and wishing to speak
Victor Toniolo, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
William Butcher, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Please see the attached registrant list for additional registrants who did not wish to speak.

Kaliszewski opened the public hearing.

Bailey provided background information on the landmark nomination. She said that staff believes the standards for designating the property as a local Madison landmark are met and recommends that the Landmarks Commission refer the landmark nomination to the Common Council for designation with the conditions that a description of the existing historic chimney be included and three apostrophe errors be corrected as noted in the staff report.

The following registrants spoke in support of the nomination: Bob Klebba, Amy Squitieri, Daniel Wiltrout, John Rolling, Dave Grace, Andrea Janquart, Larry Nesper (on behalf of Sherman Terrace Neighborhood Association), Robert Johnson, Mary Alice Wimmer, Gary Tipler, Mary Ellen Spoerke, Michael Bridgeman, Timothy Jones, Alex Saloutos, Kevin Revolinski, and Ed Jordan.

The following registrants spoke in opposition to the nomination: Blake Alvarenga, Josh Olson, Matthew Havey, Melissa Huggins, Kirk Biodrowski, Victor Toniolo, and William Butcher.

Kaliszewski closed the public hearing.

Ald. Tishler asked about the nomination process and referral to Common Council. Bailey said that the Landmarks Commission will review the nomination today, then there is a month before the Common Council could take action on the item. She explained that any land use application for the site submitted within that timeframe is subject to regulations in place at the time of application; at the moment, the property is not a landmark. If a land use application is submitted to Plan Commission up until when the Common Council makes a decision, it is not a landmark and the application would proceed with the regulations in place at the time the application was submitted.

Ald. Tishler asked if it was possible for the commission to request an independent evaluation of the building and how it could be a candidate for adaptive reuse. He said this seems like a middle ground because we would have the development the city needs and would keep a structure that the commission has already viewed as having historic value. He also noted energy and environmental concerns of demolishing buildings and constructing new structures. He said that adaptive reuse may cost more, but it has been done before and helps maintain the quirkiness of the city that makes Madison unique. Bailey said that any building can be reused if you put enough money into it, but asked who would pay for this proposed independent assessment. She noted that the Landmarks Commission is currently only looking at the criteria for landmark designation.

Ald. Benford referenced the significance of CUNA and CUNA's history to the nomination and asked if anyone from CUNA has weighed in on the nomination. Bailey said that CUNA has not provided any comments. Ald. Benford said that if this building was so important to CUNA and they removed the cornerstone, why haven't they been involved? He referenced a letter he previously submitted to the commission and noted that as a Black man, any association with Harry Truman, an avowed racist, does not merit consideration. He said that he wasn't here to argue the historic merit of the building, which was subjective and personal, but he personally did not see it.

Harris referenced the applicable standards in 41.07(2)(a) and 41.07(2)(b) and noted that the Landmarks Commission has previously determined that the building has historic value, so now they need to determine if it rises to the level of these standards. She said that she is more convinced by 41.07(2)(a), the role of the building in the broader historical context, than 41.07(2)(b), the importance of a particular event in history.

Taylor said that the commission needed to stick with their previous determination that the building has strong historical significance based on the CUNA movement and presidential visit and ceremony.

McLean agreed with Harris' assessment that the nomination was stronger in 41.07(2)(a) than 41.07(2)(b). He said that after reading the nomination, there was much more history to the building than he had expected. He said that the programs and outreach that CUNA developed when they occupied this building had a positive, far-reaching impact beyond Madison and Dane County to the entire state, nation, and world. He was impressed by this foresight and drive to help others in distant locations in the 1950s-70s. He said this has ties back to the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Idea, which is all about outreach. He said these associations between UW and CUNA connect the Filene House even more deeply to the Madison area, while also expressing the Wisconsin Idea beyond our national borders in an effort to help underprivileged, less fortunate individuals become able to sustain themselves. He said that those options were not available until the programs created within this building came to be. He said that sometimes we need

structures like this to remind us of the history rather than a plaque one has to seek out, as was suggested in public comment. Regarding the architecture, he said that it reflects the principles and concepts developed here and shared with people around the globe. He said that he noticed the building from the first time he saw it, and there was something pleasing about it that fits well in the park area. He mentioned its comfortable proportions with nothing dramatic that gets in your face; the proportions of windows and solids to voids is very calming in the park setting. He suggested that was why people may not immediately notice the building. He said that the building is comfortable in its setting and appealing in the sense of it being unobtrusive and simple. Related to 41.07(2)(b), he said that the building was dedicated to CUNA founder Edward Filene, and the programs he developed were brought here and were important to everyone who was part of the Credit Union National Association. He said that was bigger than just this city, and it was a significant decision to dedicate the building to a person who brought important programs to people who otherwise may not have had access to the necessary resources to pursue a prosperous life. He suggested that would fit the standards in 41.07(2)(b), beyond the presidential experience. He said that it is more about what has come from this building rather than who has visited it, and those programs and ideas have impacted many others beyond an individual or a city. He concluded that the nomination met the standards in 41.07(2)(a), and some of 41.07(2)(b).

Kaliszewski agreed there was a strong case for 41.07(2)(a) and pointed out that there are a lot of things in the history of the country that people are unaware of, but they are still important to this country. She agreed that 41.07(2)(b) was not the greatest argument for this particular landmark, but the larger idea of credit unions and their importance to Madison, the state, and the country make this at least a locally significant property.

Action

A motion was made by McLean, seconded by Tishler, to refer the landmark nomination to the Common Council for designation as meeting the standards of 41.07(2)(a) for its association with CUNA from 1950-1979 and 41.07(2)(b) as a memorial to Edward Filene, not for 41.07(2)(b) for its association with the Truman dedication event; and with the conditions that a description of the existing historic chimney be included and three apostrophe errors be corrected as noted in the staff report. The motion passed unanimously by the following vote:

Ayes: 4 - William Tishler; David W.J. McLean; Molly S. Harris and Maurice D. Taylor

Excused: 2 - Edna Ely-Ledesma and Richard B. Arnesen

Non Voting: 1 - Katherine N. Kaliszewski