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December 4, 2023

To: City of Madison Landmarks Commission

Re: Hovde Properties Requests for Demolition  
Landmarks Commission Meeting Dec. 4 (Item 7), Legistar File No. 75031

Dear Commissioners,

Hovde Properties has recently announced its intention to file a request to demolish the structures on six parcels near the corner of North Fairchild Street and West Mifflin Street.

The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, an organization with nearly 400 members, opposes the demolitions under the current circumstances and asks the Landmarks Commission to make a recommendation to the Plan Commission that at least five of these six structures merit protection because of their significant historic value. The Madison Trust believes its position aligns with that of the neighborhood and Alder Mike Verveer.

All five of the buildings with addresses on West Mifflin Street were identified as contributing structures within a proposed State Street National Register Historic District approximately 20 years ago. Although that nomination was eventually withdrawn at the behest of some of the landlords with property within the district's borders, the carefully prepared nomination document provides a clear context for their inclusion in a highly intact collection of commercial buildings constructed over the course of nearly 150 years. Their decorative facades of terra cotta are excellent examples from a relatively brief period of American architecture when this material was often featured. Madison's surviving examples of this construction material are few. These five buildings were designed and built as a single project, the Mifflin Arcade. This shopping destination served as Madison's initial effort to create a linked set of similar structures in a single convenient location that offered a variety of complementary shopping opportunities for its automobile enabled citizens. The Arcade continues to serve an important role in Madison's history.

This is at least the third time in the last 25 years that Hovde Properties has sought to demolish buildings occupying much of this important downtown corner. In no instance has there been any articulation of a compelling rationale. Most recently, the opaque justification offered by the

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firm's president is that without demolition, "there will be significant issues that cannot be adequately mitigated otherwise." One would hope there is a plan behind an expansive demolition proposal that would leave a gaping hole of indeterminate duration in a block fronting the Square. However, Hovde's president has denied that one exists: "We have not set a specific plan ready to submit and it is too early to specify a start date or specific uses."<sup>1</sup>

In its 2000 proposal, Hovde wanted to demolish four of the five buildings along West Mifflin Street to create surface parking. That proposal was rejected. **The continuing absence of a plan suggests that the City has avoided more than two decades of staring at a large expanse of surface parking in the center of downtown.**

In July of 2019, the Landmarks Commission addressed another demolition effort by the same applicant for four of the five buildings along West Mifflin Street while the buildings were subject to a work order for neglect. The Commission found that the four buildings in the Mifflin Arcade had "historic value based on architectural significance, cultural significance, historic significance as the work/product of an architect of note, its status as a contributing structure in a National Register Historic District, and as an intact or rare example of a certain architectural style or method of construction."

More recently, Hovde Properties has gained control over the fifth and final segment of the Mifflin Arcade and has identified an intent to demolish the entire Arcade as well as the three-story rear segment (15 N. Fairchild St.) of the Wisconsin Power and Light Building (now renamed the Hovde Building) that faces West Washington Avenue. The fifth parcel within the Mifflin Arcade is entitled to the same historic status enjoyed by the remaining four parcels along West Mifflin Street.

At the time this letter has been prepared, the Madison Trust has not completed its review of the history related to the building occupying the parcel with the address of 15 N. Fairchild St. Our organization will supplement this letter as appropriate.

The Madison Trust is opposed to the demolition of these historically significant buildings. This is especially the case when the proposed developer has neither a plan nor a timeline.

Sincerely,

*Rick Chandler*

Rick Chandler  
President

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<sup>1</sup> Both quotes by Hovde Property President Randy Guenther are from Dean Mosiman's article in the November 19, 2023, edition of the Wisconsin State Journal.