

7/15/2008 11:57 AM

Rankin, Katherine

From: ALEXANDER J WAGNER [ajwagner1@wisc.edu]
Sent: Monday, July 14, 2008 6:33 PM
To: Rankin, Katherine
Subject: Comments on the St. Raphael's situation



Rankin letter.doc (37 KB)

Note: I have attached a copy of this letter in Word format, in case it is easier to read that way.

Dear Ms. Rankin,

As a lifelong Madison-area resident and Catholic who hopes to stay in the Madison area for many years to come, I am probably just as much or more personally affected by the St. Raphael's situation than are many of the people who are commenting on it. It is for this reason that I would like to submit my comments on the situation, and my hope for moderation and compromise from all parties involved, including Brock Riebe, the Diocese of Madison, and the Landmarks Commission.

The loss of the St. Raphael's building was a tragic one not only for Catholics in Madison, but the entire population of Madison. But I would simply ask that the Landmarks Commission not add insult to injury by making any sort of decision or recommendation which would make it impossible and/or cost-prohibitive for the diocese to build a replacement cathedral which meets its changing needs. For example, during the aftermath of the fire, I remember hearing that St. Raphael's had always had a smaller-than-optimal seating capacity for a cathedral in a city of Madison's size. So the diocese may well wish to increase the "footprint" of the building to allow this. However, if the diocese is expected to save the existing walls as much as possible, this may be cost-prohibitive or even impossible. Furthermore, I believe you yourself have stated that the building is structurally unsound, and any rehabbing of it would not be cost-effective either.

On the other hand, allowances for historical preservation should be made, as well. Although at first I wouldn't have minded if the diocese had simply started over from scratch with the design, I have come around to the view that they ought to honor the heritage of the original building, especially with regards to the exterior. Frankly, I hope the exterior looks as much like the original building as possible. This seems to be what many people want, and it is a reasonable request. Perhaps the Landmarks Commission could "posthumously" declare St. Raphael's a landmark, and issue a statement "strongly urging" the diocese to preserve as much of the design and spirit of the original building as possible. But I hope they won't go any further.

Mr. Riebe, who got this discussion started, was quoted as saying, "You have to ask, 'What is valuable in Madison? All I see is more of these plastic buildings going up, making this some bland, vanilla, anywhere USA city.'" I would hope he, and others with the same concerns, would understand that if anything, the new cathedral would be less "plastic," "bland," or "vanilla" than ever before. It is not as though Bishop Morlino intends to build luxury condominiums or a strip mall on the St. Raphael's site. Rather, he hopes to build a "worthy cathedral" which will inspire current and future generations of Catholics like myself for many years to come.

It is a rare situation for a treasured landmark to burn down. It is even rarer for a Catholic diocese to have the opportunity to build a new cathedral which meets the needs of the church in the 21st century, while still honoring the architectural legacy of the past. I hope the City of Madison will grant them this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Alex Wagner

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