

August 7, 2011

Landmarks Commission
City of Madison
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing in support of the nomination advanced by Amy Kinast to extend Landmark status to the Erdman Office and Shop located at 5117 University Avenue.

Although a demolition permit was considered in the summer of 2010 and concerns were not raised, in the interim Madison Architectural Historian Elizabeth Miller filed the recommendation to the WI-SHPO that the building be considered eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places.¹ Miller offers a compelling discussion concerning the significance of Marshall Erdman's early work in pre-fabrication (of houses, medical clinics and schools) as having local, regional, national and international impacts.

Although it has been argued that other buildings in the Madison area better convey Erdman's professional contributions, I am unaware of another single structure that comes close to the facility that functioned as Erdman's headquarters for the length of his career. Designed by Erdman's colleague, William V. Kaeser, the building at 5117 University Avenue provided Erdman with administrative (1949) and production spaces (1951) as his work in the use of pre-fabricated building components expanded and diversified.

The relationship between Marshall Erdman and architect William Kaeser represented a significant collaboration for both men. Kaeser's contributions as a mid-20th century American Architect, possibly of national interest, have yet to be fully explored. My 1985 MA thesis, "The Residential Architecture of William V. Kaeser," developed under the guidance of UW Professor Narciso Menocal, suggests Kaeser likely was the most significant Wisconsin architect working in a Wrightian mode following World War II. Permitting the demolition of a building that was Erdman's workplace, in addition to being evocative of his relationship with architect Kaeser, is short-sighted. This is particularly true as the City of Madison is making significant strides in its new appreciation of its post-World War II building stock.

¹ Division of Historic Preservation, Wisconsin Historical Society. "Wisconsin Historical Society Determination of Eligibility Form, Agency # Wis DOT 5992-08-18, WHS # 10-1465/DA, Erdman & Associates Office and Shop (Building No. 1), 5117 University Avenue, City of Madison, Dane County, 53705." Certified Dec. 2010. Prepared by Elizabeth Miller.

C O R N E R S T O N E

P R E S E R V A T I O N

Research & Planning

The proposed development shows the Erdman Office at its western boundary. I would like to urge the Preservation Commission to designate Landmark status to the Erdman Office and Shop, which would provide Erdman Real Estate Holdings, LLC with an opportunity to reconsider its plans to demolish it. If rehabilitated properly, it could be an ongoing and tangible testament to the legacy of Marshall Erdman, while also contributing to the larger redevelopment of the site.

With sincere thanks for your consideration,

Anne E. Biebel

Anne E. Biebel
Principal/Architectural Historian

