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To: Rummel, Marsha; Scanlon, Amy; Fruhling, William
Cc: Verveer, Mike; G.D. Geib; Gail Jaeger; Milton L. Pozo; Mercedes Pozo
Subject: Landmarks Commission meeting and Holy Redeemer School
Date: Monday, March 11, 2013 1:11:07 PM

Dear Members of the City of Madison Landmarks Commission,

My understanding that today (Monday, 11 March 2013) you will be acting on an application nominally coming from "The Cathedral Parish of St. Raphael" regarding the conversion of the historic Holy Redeemer School building into student apartments. The presentation will, if I understand correctly, be made by Mr. Mark Landgraf and other members of the development team.

My name is Richard Bonomo. I have been a member of the Roman Catholic community at Holy Redeemer since approximately 1980. I have served and continue to serve in various volunteer capacities at Holy Redeemer. I believe I still have the title of "Building and Maintenance Supervisor." In any case, I have been deeply involved in physical plant matters at Holy Redeemer for perhaps 2 decades, including matters pertaining to the school. I wound up managing, for example, a major renovation of parts of the church a number of years ago, and also handled the repair of the school chimney when a city inspector notified us that the top of the chimney was dangerously decaying.

As I will not be at the meeting tonight because of scheduling conflicts, I thought I would transmit to you my thoughts on the matter via electronic mail.

This current project has gone forward thus far without my involvement. Indeed, the pastor ordered a sudden change in the exterior locks last January that has prevented me from entering the building, except for strangely supervised (by a janitor) occasions to retrieve scaffolding I had stored within, despite my long standing involvement with it.

There was a neighborhood meeting at Holy Redeemer Church this past Wednesday in which the development team presented their plans for the exterior of the school building in connection with the conversion to apartments. Most of those in attendance were members of the Holy Redeemer community. (Technically, we have not been our own "parish" since we were forced into a merger with the parishes of St. Patrick parish and St. Raphael Cathedral parish.)

I will note, as something of an aside that:

1. This was the FIRST occasion for something resembling an honest, face-to-face conversation between the rector (Msgr. Kevin Holmes) and the members of the community of Holy Redeemer. That it took a meeting of the neighborhood mandated by the city to provide an occasion for this attempt at a real conversation was rather shocking to the neighbors in attendance.
2. The comments from the neighbors and the church community were overwhelmingly against proceeding with the concept as presented.
3. The rector attempted to prevent a church community member who was very briefly presenting a concept for preservation and renovation that would NOT involve conversion of our building from speaking. The neighborhood president who was chairing the meeting overruled the rector and allowed her to proceed.
4. The development team did not present detailed plans for the interior design. It seems that these were still being worked on.

To get to the matter of your considerations tonight:

1. The fact that the interior designs have not been settled and presented to the neighborhood at the neighborhood meeting -- since the design will affect the functioning of the building and therefore its affect on the neighborhood -- has me wondering if the requirements of the law, or at least the spirit thereof, have actually been met by the meeting. The information presented was simply, by necessity of circumstance, incomplete.
2. Part of the exterior plan is to simply remove the fire escapes. The fire escapes, on the exterior of the building, are necessary to allow the auditorium to function at maximum legal capacity. If the fire escapes are removed, then the auditorium functioning is impaired. If the usability of the auditorium is impaired, that may affect the eligibility of the project for historic preservation credits. I will note that statements are sometimes made that the escape structures are not safe. I would not put any credence in these statements without evaluation by a neutral 3rd party. I have not had a chance to closely inspect the fire escapes myself, recently, and do not know that I would be given authorization to do so. I HAVE stood on the escape structure on a number of occasions, as recently as last December, and have not noticed obvious and urgent problems.
3. I am not sure that the entity that is officially doing the proposing (The Cathedral Parish of St. Raphael) has clear title to the church property. The title to Holy Redeemer Church (and its land and auxiliary buildings) was transferred to the Cathedral Parish in February 2010 (according to the city website). I am not familiar with the law concerning these things nor the details of the Congregation's 1883 charter, but I would think that a major transfer of assets from one incorporated religious society to another would require a formal meeting (with appropriate notifications) of the trustees (at least) and a formal recorded vote. To the best of my knowledge, the lay trustees of Holy Redeemer, Gail Jaeger (who is still active in the church community) and Ken Vandenwymelenberg (who apparently left some time after the merger) were never notified of such a meeting, nor even notified that a transfer took place. The rector has not called an election for trustees of Holy Redeemer Congregation for many years. I am guessing that the sitting trustees serve until their replacements are elected, unless they resign or leave. Even though though the primary de facto decision maker (the rector or pastor) would be the same in either case, it seems to me that it should be verified that the transfer is complete and that the entity in whose name this project is being put forward actually has a clear and unchallengeable title. If the title is not clear and unchallengeable, then -- I would think -- the proposal is legally out of order.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that there are sufficient questions regarding completeness of property transfer, the effect of external changes to the building (i.e. the fire escapes) on the very viability of the project, and about the completeness of the neighborhood presentation that the Commission should table consideration of the project for at least 60 days to allow for a proper and thorough examination of these issues.

Thank you for your attention.

Richard Bonomo member, Holy Redeemer Congregation since approximately 1980