

## Punt, Colin

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**From:** Jay <bhangraj@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 19, 2020 2:54 AM  
**To:** Linda  
**Cc:** Benjamin Pierce; Karen Mullis; ambrosia@madisoncommunity.coop; audrelordecoop@gmail.com; BERT STITT2; Mullins, Bradley; Chi Omega House Mother; coordinatingofficer@madisoncommunity.coop; Punt, Colin; to: Jean Huddleston; diego.lemahernandez; Heck, Patrick; Prestigiacom, Max; Dave Mollenhoff; Mark and Tammy Ehrmann; Eli Judge; Franny Ingebritson; Fred Mohs; Glyphia; Greggar Isaksen; Gary Tipler; internationalcoop@gmail.com; Kris Sonnentag; Yonden Dorje; Ledell Zellers; machacoop@gmail.com; Dan McCammon; James McFadden; Mike Stengl; Mitnick, Matt; Nicholas Garton; Peter Ostlind; ALEXIS MARIE PREEDGE; CNI President; Rivendell Coop; Sally Rohrer; Christine Hughes; Barb Garrity; Bill Lizdas; Amol Goyal; Adrian Philip Lampron; SAMUEL ANTHONY JORUDD; JULIAN LUKE NAZARETH; Lennox Owino Ochieng; Elena Haas; EMMA R AXELROD; Campus Area Neighborhood Association; Kurt Stege; Alex Saloutos; Madeline Norton; Bob Klebba  
**Subject:** Re: Recent 619/621 Lake St Communications

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Apologies for any presumptions on my part--as you can probably tell, I am not entirely familiar with the backgrounds and norms of this group and was simply trying to manage expectations. Probably poorly, I admit, but it's a bit of a challenge to balance the demands from this housing project simultaneously with those of hospital administration as you're activating your COVID surge plans. As you might guess, "working days" are a bit less clear cut for me than one might normally assume... especially as of late.

Nonetheless, you asked for an account of Bob Klebba's comments & their inaccuracies, which I've provided below--his comments in **bold** and the explanation in normal text.

**"They are unwilling to consider relocating so that the historic buildings could be preserved."**

Early in our efforts to find a more sustainable future for our organization & houses, we raised this very option with our members and alumni. The overwhelming response was to keep the location, which we have occupied since 1925. Our history is the history of these buildings, and our history sits in the people, the values, and the community found within our organization and its role in supporting students pursuing science & chemistry. It is this history of affordable student housing & scholarly community (which is in jeopardy) that we seek to preserve.

Furthermore, nearly all of our members have a deep appreciation for these houses. They contain generations of memories and many beloved features. To the extent that we are able, we have even identified specific building finishes and materials (e.g., crown molding) which we plan to incorporate into the design of the new space.

**"We should be concerned about this application for development for several reasons:**

- **proposed demolition of contributing buildings in an historic district**
- **significant proposed destruction of the interface of the historic district with campus**
- **proposed replacement of affordable housing with luxury apartments**
- **allowing a property owner to use "demolition by neglect" as a reason to redevelop**

Yes, these properties are in a *National* historic district but it is not a *Local* historic district. Their listing status provides tax credits as the sole benefit (more on that later) and their only "contribution" is their age.

"Luxury apartments" is completely false. Alpha Chi Sigma has always kept rents well below market value for the area to ensure affordability of housing. Part of the rationale for partnering with Patrick Properties was also predicated on the fact that we could continue this tradition of affordability, and his building's rents at 621 Mendota Ct are either at or slightly below market rates.

"Demolition by neglect" is also false. We have poured countless dollars and hours of blood/sweat/tears into maintaining the houses for decades, largely following the co-op housing model in order to keep rents low. Three member-elected positions, filled by house residents, lead a committee which oversees the houses on a day-to-day basis. All members, including nonresidents, are required to commit several hours each semester to upkeep and light maintenance. Professionals were frequently brought in for more complex repairs (e.g., plumbing, electrical) and larger projects (e.g., room renovations, deck replacement). Furthermore, we contracted with property management companies from 2015 until the houses were vacated in 2019 in order to extend the lives of the houses as much as possible, but the extent of rehab needed and mounting health & safety issues forced us to cease renting rooms to our members. Our housing committee is still active, albeit reduced in size, and conducts regular walkthroughs of the properties to identify any new issues and keep them intact to the extent possible. All of that said--we are also not an organization with significant financial resources or wealthy alumni donors. For as long as most of our alumni can even remember, the central challenge had essentially been having a 10-item list of problems while only having the money to fix 5 of them. We leveraged our properties up to the hilt to secure loans for the rest, and just as we neared paying them off, the cycle would start again. This approach nearly brought us to the edge of bankruptcy in order to keep the houses standing as long as they have.

### **Personally, I have some other issues**

- **The fraternity building corporation is proposing a development much larger than what the fraternity needs to house its members so that it can pay for the demolition and redevelopment.**
- **The fraternity argues it needs to house all its members in one location, even though very few greek life residences do so.**
- **The Campus Area Neighborhood Association is hosting the meeting tonight even though one of the board members is a member of the fraternity and is a strong proponent of the demolition and redevelopment."**

The development we are proposing is really best understood as a joint venture. The aforementioned financial constraints severely limited our ability to pay for any rehabilitation or redevelopment efforts--in essence, our value was that of the land and the houses. The only way a third party would even consider helping us out was if there was some kind of incentive, and the size & scale of the proposal just barely manages to make the economics work out for both our organization and a developer partner.

We never argued that we *\*needed\** to house all our members in one location--only that it would be nice to have that opportunity.

The CANA / fraternity member in question had recused herself from all neighborhood and Steering Committee proceedings to avoid any conflicts of interest.

**"The building manager showed why they want to demolish 619 and 621. He showed several photos of delayed maintenance, lack of upkeep and inability to maintain the buildings during the winter months (allowing burst pipes). This is the definition of demolition by neglect....Furthermore, the building manager stated incorrectly that they could not take advantage of historic preservation tax credits in order to help finance the rehabilitation of the 2 buildings. I gave a presentation on how these work last**

**week at the annual Wisconsin Historical Society conference on how to use historic preservation tax credits. If they had started the process in 2014 as the manager said they did, they could have had the credits by 2015. The fraternity have not pursued rehabilitation and prefer not take ownership of their lack of maintenance of the buildings."**

Earlier in this email, I think I covered the maintenance / demolition by neglect piece. On the historic preservation tax credits--we are a tax-exempt nonprofit organization. This eliminates any benefit of federal tax credits as they are non-transferable without a change in ownership. State tax credits conceptually provide a financing mechanism by virtue of being transferable, but they had an insufficient financial benefit. Briefly, while there is a monthly rent rate "R" x 20 rooms which would enable a tax-credit+debt-financed total rehab of the properties, the value of "R" was more than 50% greater than what our members paid before they vacated and above market rate for the area. It would essentially be gentrifying our own members out of their own house. Perhaps that may be acceptable to some, but it is an unacceptable price to pay--especially when there are alternatives (i.e., Alchemy Apartments) that can better meet our needs.

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If you read all the way through to the end, thank you for your perseverance. I recognize this project has generated some controversy, so if there was one thing I would want you all to take away from this, it would be the following:

**This is NOT a case of a developer tearing down historic properties to build a high-rise. It is a case of a long-standing student community trying to preserve its history and legacy for future generations to come.**

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have further questions or concerns.

Kindly,  
Jay

On Wed, Nov 18, 2020 at 12:18 PM Linda <[lehnertz.l@att.net](mailto:lehnertz.l@att.net)> wrote:

Mr. Sekhon,

Thank you for the acknowledgement of receipt. I think everyone on this list would understand a simple statement that you cannot take the time to reply during working hours. Over 90% of this list is also acting in a volunteer capacity, devoting our time to understanding the various issues involved in your proposal, to further a civic purpose we hold dear. We, too, have real lives with jobs and other obligations. I did not expect an immediate reply.

And just to be clear --I was not requesting "a more detailed outline." I was, and am, requesting detailed answers to the issues you raised in your initial communication to this group.

Linda

**From:** Jay [mailto:[bhangraj@gmail.com](mailto:bhangraj@gmail.com)]

**Sent:** Wednesday, November 18, 2020 1:28 PM

**To:** Benjamin Pierce <[benjamin.pierce@gmail.com](mailto:benjamin.pierce@gmail.com)>

**Cc:** Linda <[lehnertz.l@att.net](mailto:lehnertz.l@att.net)>; Karen Mullis <[aephisigma.housedirector@gmail.com](mailto:aephisigma.housedirector@gmail.com)>;

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**Subject:** Re: Recent 619/621 Lake St Communications

Linda, Benjamin,

Thanks for the responses. I aim to provide a more detailed outline of the points you've requested later today when I have a moment, as I am a working professional first & foremost. This is, perhaps, one such nuance which has been lost in correspondence to date--I, along with the other alumni members of the housing board, serve in these roles as volunteers and receive no compensation or rewards for our work. It is entirely a labor of love for an organization which we care deeply about.

Just wanted to let you know that I am seeing your messages and I appreciate your patience.

Kindly,

Jay

On Wed, Nov 18, 2020 at 2:05 PM Benjamin Pierce <[benjamin.pierce@gmail.com](mailto:benjamin.pierce@gmail.com)> wrote:

Mr. Sekhon:

What Linda said: at this moment I am stepping aside from what conclusions or perceptions I may have formed for myself. I happen to have a long-term investment in the quality of this neighborhood and in the functionality of it's committee. Like it or not, we have competing and consequential claims about a matter of lasting, if local, consequence. I mean to weigh all claims for myself, accounting for the possibility that I may find all initial cases to be lacking in their initial presentation. While I am receptive to the possibility that Alpha Chi Sigma may not have been represented in a fair light, I do require specifics and evidence in that regard to view the latest assertions as more than just assertions. Say what you will about Bob Klebb's share of the prior communication, he has given enough specifics that I would at least know how to proceed to verify or refute his version of the situation, and--fair is fair. If there is to be a contest over which account of affairs is the better approximation, I will need to know your counter-case.

Benjamin Pierce

On Wed, Nov 18, 2020 at 11:10 AM Linda <[lehnertz.l@att.net](mailto:lehnertz.l@att.net)> wrote:

Mr. Sekhon,

You say you can "definitively state that they [Bob Klebb's comments] grossly misrepresent the facts, nature, and intentions of this project."

I am interested in what you consider a misrepresentation. If you could, for each comment you consider a misrepresentation, please: (1) provide the comment; and, (2) explain why that particular comment is inaccurate.

Thanks,

Linda

**From:** Jay [mailto:[bhangraj@gmail.com](mailto:bhangraj@gmail.com)]

**Sent:** Wednesday, November 18, 2020 9:07 AM

**To:** [aephisigmahousedirector@gmail.com](mailto:aephisigmahousedirector@gmail.com); [ambrosia@madisoncommunity.coop](mailto:ambrosia@madisoncommunity.coop); [audrelordecoop@gmail.com](mailto:audrelordecoop@gmail.com); Benjamin Pierce <[benjamin.pierce@gmail.com](mailto:benjamin.pierce@gmail.com)>; BERT STITT2 <[bertstitt@tds.net](mailto:bertstitt@tds.net)>; Brad Mullins <[brad@mullinsgroup.com](mailto:brad@mullinsgroup.com)>; Chi Omega House Mother <[chiomeganu.housemother@gmail.com](mailto:chiomeganu.housemother@gmail.com)>; [coordinatingofficer@madisoncommunity.coop](mailto:coordinatingofficer@madisoncommunity.coop); Colin <[cpunt@cityofmadison.com](mailto:cpunt@cityofmadison.com)>; [dghousemom103@gmail.com](mailto:dghousemom103@gmail.com); Diego Lema Hernandez <[diego.lemahernandez@wisc.edu](mailto:diego.lemahernandez@wisc.edu)>; Patrick Heck <[district2@cityofmadison.com](mailto:district2@cityofmadison.com)>; [district8@cityofmadison.com](mailto:district8@cityofmadison.com); Dave Mollenhoff <[dmollenhoff@charter.net](mailto:dmollenhoff@charter.net)>; Mark and Tammy Ehrmann <[ehrfamily@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ehrfamily@sbcglobal.net)>; Eli Judge <[elijudge1@gmail.com](mailto:elijudge1@gmail.com)>; Franny Ingebritson <[fingebritson@gmail.com](mailto:fingebritson@gmail.com)>; Fred Mohs <[fred@mwp-law.com](mailto:fred@mwp-law.com)>; [glyphia.xo@gmail.com](mailto:glyphia.xo@gmail.com); Greggar Isaksen <[greggar@northbaytrading.com](mailto:greggar@northbaytrading.com)>; Gary Tipler <[garytip8778@gmail.com](mailto:garytip8778@gmail.com)>; [internationalcoop@gmail.com](mailto:internationalcoop@gmail.com); Kris Sonnentag <[kasonnentag@charter.net](mailto:kasonnentag@charter.net)>; Yonden

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**Subject:** Recent 619/621 Lake St Communications

Hello everyone,

I hope this note finds you healthy, safe, and well.

I recently learned of a few emails which Bob Klebba has sent to this group over the past weeks regarding the development plans for the Alpha Chi Sigma fraternity houses at 619 and 621 N Lake St. While I cannot speak to his motivations for sending such messages, I can definitively state that they grossly misrepresent the facts, nature, and intentions of this project.

As the current president of the alumni board which owns said houses, I want to emphasize that we--including our developer partner and architect--have been completely transparent with all aspects of the project from the application to the newspaper article to the neighborhood meetings. I was greatly disappointed to see this earnestness get distorted to fit a skewed and, at moments, personally disparaging narrative.

Nonetheless, I would like to extend that same sense of openness to all of you. You are welcome to contact me directly via email/phone/text with any questions, and I would be happy to discuss any concerns you might have about the project. Please do not hesitate to reach out.

Kindly,

Jay

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Jay Sekhon

*President*

**Alpha Chapter of Alpha Chi Sigma, Building Corporation**

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