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October 28, 2021

Mayor Andrew J. Ginther

City Hall 2nd Floor

90 West Broad Street

Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Mayor Ginther:

This is the first time that Columbus Landmarks has contacted you directly. This letter serves as an **urgent appeal to re-direct the City of Columbus plan that includes demolition of the South Dormitory on the Columbus Public Health campus.** The plan creates additional surface parking and drive-thru activity space on the 9-acre campus of the old Ohio State School for the Blind that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The City of Columbus leads by example and has completed numerous creative and high-quality preservation projects including the award-winning Lincoln Theatre. We are extremely concerned about the overall optics of the plan and the precedent this demolition will set in terms of equity, sustainability, housing, health, transportation, environment, and yes – local and statewide history, as well as the loss of significant architecture. So are the 630 architects, developers, planners, business and community leaders, artists, educators, historians, neighbors, and citizens who have signed a petition to save this building (attached) and who have provided productive ideas for its reuse.

***The irony of the City of Columbus expending resources to demolish a desirable, adaptable and reusable dormitory on the health campus while there is a dire need for supportive housing - as evidenced by the homeless encampment directly across Main Street - is lost on no one.***

In addition, the current plan:

- prioritizes cars over people in our Smart City
- undermines the Urban Forestry Master Plan
- derails the draft Climate Action Plan

We ask you to engage your Cabinet in a new, fiscally responsible plan that achieves the goals of Columbus Public Health while preserving a valuable City of Columbus real estate asset. **Columbus Landmarks stands ready with resources to help secure the South Dormitory, to create a plan for its productive reuse, and to celebrate the City of Columbus for its good stewardship as owners of the building.**

Columbus Landmarks is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has advocated for historic preservation and new design excellence since 1977. We believe in the power and potential of buildings to create a better, more equitable and sustainable Columbus today, and an architectural legacy for future generations. We work hard every day for the betterment of our City.



Older buildings are finite and dwindling resources in Columbus, where fewer than 25% of buildings date to pre-1945 compared to a 50-city average of 38%. Sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places, like the old Ohio State School for the Blind at 240 Parsons Ave., are far fewer – with just 150 individual buildings having achieved this status throughout Columbus.

The two fireproof dormitory buildings were built in 1935 to flank the main building, and completed the Blind School facilities. Previously, students were housed on the third and fourth floors of the main building, which was deemed an extreme fire hazard for blind children. The two new dorms were designed to ensure the health and safety of the students. The North Dormitory was for boys; the South for girls; and each accommodated 132 students and four matrons. John Schooley, Sr. was State Architect at the time of the construction of the dorms and designed these in a beautiful Jacobethan Revival Style with materials and details that cannot be matched or afforded today. The dormitories reflect the 20th century "Cottage Plan" of asylum design where separate buildings were constructed to better segregate sexes than the former 19th century "Kirkbride Plan" with everyone housed in one building.

Please do not allow a most desirable piece of neighborhood architecture to be demolished for a plan that can be achieved without such obvious waste. **Improvements to the Columbus Public Health campus should respect neighborhood history and allow for adaptive reuse of the building to meet the growing demand for supportive housing or other critical services.**

Respectfully yours,

Becky West  
Executive Director

Enclosure (1)

cc: Director Joseph Lombardi  
Director Mysheika Roberts, MD  
Director Michael Stevens  
Director Carla Williams-Scott