



Aug. 11, 2020

To the honorable Detroit Historic District Commission,

I write to you regarding The Parade Company's proposed redevelopment and partial demolition of the Brodhead Armory.

My name is Dan Austin, and I am a dedicated historic preservationist and proud resident of District 7's Aviation Sub. I am an author of books on Detroit's architectural history and run the online architectural resource HistoricDetroit.org. Though I sit on the board of Preservation Detroit, I do not write to you today on behalf of that organization.

It has been nearly 20 years since the Brodhead closed. Over those years, we have seen unfortunate deterioration and unfathomable loss through the theft of the Denby Memorial, as well as the ransacking of the armory's storied woodwork and artwork. Though Detroit has seen many other architectural gems renovated, there has been little hope that the armory would see the same. The Parade Company is to be commended for its commitment to the city and its vision for reactivating this historic building to be a key piece of our city's riverfront once again. I can think of no better tenant for the Brodhead. However, I do have considerable reservations about whether the proposal laid out to you represents the best stewardship of this property.

Though I understand that one of the biggest challenges in finding a suitor for the Brodhead is the building and its layout, the southern WPA-era addition of the building is arguably what makes the armory so special in the first place. I am disappointed that the visionaries at Rossetti and the Parade Company have been unable to find a creative solution that saves not only this portion of the building but the Parade Company money, as well.

But all of that said, I am not an architect. Nor would anyone ever call me a designer. If Rossetti and the Parade Company truly cannot find a way to save the entire structure, and they feel that they have exhausted every realistic avenue to do so, then I urge the Commission to approve their proposal.

Saving some of the armory is far better than saving none. I also realize that in terms of historic preservation, we must be realists and not dreamers, lest we wake up to the nightmare of yet another of Detroit's historic buildings lost to the wrecking ball. Having seen the tragic degree of decay by the elements and the desecration by scrappers and architectural thieves alike, it is my belief that the Parade Company is not only our best option for saving the Brodhead but perhaps our only option.

In closing, I commend the Parade Company for its investment in the city and its plans to save part of the city's architectural history. Yet, I urge them to reconsider demolition of the Brodhead's southern wing. If partial demo is the only option, I applaud them for their commitment to save architectural details.