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Brodhead Association

September 11, 2022

Tiffany Franklin
Chairman, Historic District Commission
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center
2 Woodward Avenue - Suite 808
Detroit, MI 48226

SUBJECT: Brodhead Armory Preservation

REFERENCE:

- (A) MI State Historical Preservation (URL)
- (B) Detroit Legal News dtd 2001-07-01

Commissioner Franklin:

The Brodhead Association, Brodhead Armory Preservation Society, and several Veteran and historic organizations are **strongly opposed** to any demolition of the former Brodhead Armory. Proposals submitted previously for the reuse and restoration of the facility have been ignored and dismissed by the City of Detroit. Some of these proposals were funded and could have been completed.

The Brodhead Association has evaluated Brodhead Armory since April 2018, encouraged by the City of Detroit Veterans Task Force. This journey has revealed an enormous story and history of Detroit, including the Black community. Precedent has been observed and established in New York, Boston, Baltimore, New Orleans, San Francisco, Williamsburg, Greenfield Village, and extensively overseas; Europe, Italy, Hungary, Egypt, Poland, etc.

During the maturation of this due diligence, three organizations have been created for the successful rehabilitation of Brodhead Armory; Brodhead Association, Brodhead Armory Preservation Society (resurrected), RTB Development LLC. These groups are readied to articulate a robust development plan that includes preservation of Brodhead Armory and a much better solution for the area community, City of Detroit and the Arsenal of Democracy.

It is noted that CDR Eric Issacson, Commanding Officer, U.S. Navy Reserve at Selfridge ANGB presented a preservation proposal to the City of Detroit soon after the U.S. Marine Corps departed. This proposal received no response. The three organizations, Veterans, and passionate supporters are prepared to bring elegant life to Brodhead Armory. Today, hundreds of Veterans, residents, and volunteers are excited at the opportunity to restore Brodhead Armory to its historical glory, representing the largest collection of WPA artwork in Michigan.



The dining room murals represent only a small portion of the historical designation and relevance. The brilliance of William (Buck) Stratton (Architect) and his wife Mary Porter (founder of Pewabic Pottery) are captured in the South 70,000 sq ft of the structure, proposed to be demolished. A review of professional literature on murals recommends that murals be restored in place (not moved) and the United States, Britain, and preservation organizations around the world have ceased almost all recommendations to relocate murals.

We find the proposal offered by The Parade Co, DEGC, and Mayor of Detroit, disparaging to the history of the Michigan Naval Militia, former Secretary of the Navy, Brodhead Armory, Veterans community, and the relevance of the City of Detroit. One Architect claimed that The Parade Co could build a larger facility in a better location at half the cost.

Reference Brodhead Armory located at 7600 E. Jefferson Ave, Detroit, Michigan 48214, **we unanimously object to any plan that would jeopardize the structure of the building, WPA artwork, or Historical Designation in accordance with the historical designation documents.**

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Federal Art Projects (FPA) were established from 1936 to 1941, and Capt Brodhead engaged artists from Cranbrook Academy of Art, David Frenthel, to complete nautical murals. In addition, artist Edgar Yaeger, John Tabaczuk, Gustave Hildebrand, and James Johnson contributed to the murals and wood carvings, completing the richest WPA art collection of any building in Michigan. Confirmation from noted preservationist confirm that all of these items can be restored or rehabilitated. It is confirmed that several items in private collections will be returned (removed to protect from destruction and vandalism).

The City of Detroit and agencies have suppressed alternative proposals. Respectfully request consideration of a proposal which would restore Brodhead Armory and add programming that brings enormous life to the City of Detroit and surrounding community, preserving and enhancing all of the history provided by Brodhead Armory.

Respectfully request your objection to any proposal that would diminish the features of Brodhead Armory.

Sincerely,

JM Semerad

James Semerad, CDR, USN (Ret)

CC:

Garrick Landsberg

Janese Chapman