



400 East Illinois Road | Lake Forest, Illinois 60045 | 847.234.1230 | www.lfpf.org

Preservation Foundation Board of Directors Statement to the City Council Regarding the Proposed Expansion of Lake Forest Library

Dear Mayor Pandaleon and Members of the City Council:

As you are all aware, a notable thing happened this past year with many historic residential properties in Lake Forest. After years of languishing on the market, large historic homes began to sell, fueled by many factors including changing buyer needs, and a desire for more space, high-quality schools, civic institutions, city services, and natural beauty. Buyers of these properties have chosen to make a substantial investment in the historic fabric of Lake Forest and many will choose to invest further by expanding and modernizing their new homes for the 21st century. Each will be held to the high standards for architectural compatibility, harmony, and respect for historic integrity that is embodied in the requirements of The City of Lake Forest Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Lake Forest is justifiably proud of its magnificent residential architectural heritage. But it is precisely the city's historic civic structures that authentically distinguish Lake Forest and contribute greatly to what makes it a desirable place to live. City Hall, Gorton Community Center, the Senior Center at Dickinson Hall, Elawa Farm, Market Square, Lake Forest Train Station, and historic houses of worship such as The First Presbyterian Church, St. Mary's Church, and The Church of the Holy Spirit, all contribute to a unified composition of historic civic structures. And all in the past 20 years have successfully found ways to modernize and expand their facilities while sensitively rehabbing and respecting the original historic integrity of their buildings.

The successful modernization and sensitive rehabilitation of each of these civic structures, plus countless historic homes didn't happen by accident. It is the result of careful planning and review processes that date back to the 1960s with the creation of the Building Review Board and then strengthened 20 years ago with the adoption of an Historic Preservation Ordinance. Standards for compatibility and harmony to which all historic property owners and stewards of historic civic buildings have been held.

Imagine if many of the recently purchased historic homes were permitted to be expanded in a manner that bears no architectural relation to the original historic structure — simply following the latest design fad merely to make it eye-catching. What would it mean for the legitimacy of our Historic Preservation Ordinance and the value of other properties throughout our historic districts?

Edwin Hill Clark's 1931 designed library is surely the centerpiece of our town's ensemble of historic civic structures. It's one of the most architecturally significant small-city libraries in the U.S. The Preservation Foundation Board of Directors recognizes that changing needs and technologies necessitate modernizing and perhaps expanding the building. However, services and spaces that are desired in the new addition, as well as parking and ADA accessibility should be integrated into the new addition while sensitively addressing the building's original architecture rather than juxtaposing a building addition of boxes clad in the latest design fad.

As the City Council considers the important "big picture" issues, including the cost to taxpayers, the potential duplication of services within the community, and the overall scope of any expansion, we ask that you give careful consideration to the following concerns:

1. Fixing the dome which has been wrapped in a white tarp for three years is paramount to this discussion. The process for considering the size and scope of any expansion plan will continue to take time. But issues relating to historic building maintenance are immediate. Addressing the basic ongoing upkeep of the building envelope is the most important and cost-effective preservation treatment for extending the life of the building and protecting its collections.
2. Any expansion of the library needs to be "right-sized" - both for the community, for the site, and the building. Issues related to life safety, ADA compliance, and structural integrity should be the highest priority. Adding to the building footprint and square footage should be considered if it's necessary for functions that don't duplicate those that already exist within the community.
3. Any expansion to the library should participate fully in the classical tradition that Edwin Hill Clark established as the "language" of the building's architecture. The parts (new and old) should act as an ensemble, not in contrast and not as "then and now". An expanded library should function as "one library" not "the old wing and the new wing". It should express that unity of function with an equal aesthetic unity. These are the very standards to which other historic property owners and stewards of historic buildings in Lake Forest's historic districts have been held.

As we have stated to representatives of the Library Board as well as publicly on several occasions, the Preservation Foundation stands ready to work collaboratively with the Library to help achieve a solution that respects the historic integrity of the building and works within the classical language of its architecture.

The future of the Library as an institution is important, but the future of the physical building in the community is no less important.

We thank you for your consideration.

March 8, 2021