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30 N. Michigan Ave.  
Suite 2020  
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[www.Landmarks.org](http://www.Landmarks.org)

February 13, 2017

Chairman Scott Weller and  
Members of the Wheaton Planning and Zoning Board  
City of Wheaton  
303 W. Wesley Street  
Wheaton, IL 60187

*RE: Loretto Convent - SA #17-04/ Subdivision/ 1600 Somerset Lane/ Pulte Home Corporation*

Dear Chairman Weller and Members of the Wheaton Planning and Zoning Board,

In a November, 2016 letter to Mayor Gresk and the City Council, we asked that the Loretto Convent redevelopment project be reviewed as a Planned Unit Development. We also asked that the Council enable both the Historic Commission and Planning and Zoning Board to thoroughly review this project, which proposes to demolish House of the Seven Gables, built in 1897 and designed by noted architect Jarvis Hunt. This important mansion was included on Landmarks Illinois' *Chicagoland Watch List* in 2009 as part of "The Colony at the Chicago Golf Club," a clear indication that its fate should have been considered long before now.

Now that a Planned Unit Development process is deemed unnecessary, we understand that this is no longer an evaluation of the appropriateness of the change in use, but rather of how the proposal meets the requirements of the subdivision ordinance. As the Board takes on this review, we note that the city of Wheaton has adopted a public policy that it should and will care about its historic properties and that it should and will evaluate potential impacts on historic structures. Wheaton's Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the importance of historic preservation as a "planning issue" and in the Community Development Policies portion of the plan, under "Neighborhood Character," the plan includes the following Goal: "To ensure that existing and new developments reflect the high quality character of the City." The plan also states as a strategy the need to "evaluate Wheaton's historic resources" and to "identify historic structures worthy of special designation." We hope the Board and city staff is taking this into consideration as they evaluate the proposed subdivision.

Due to the mansion's architectural and historic importance, it should be reused as part of the proposed redevelopment, whether by Pulte or a separate entity. We believe the Board and staff can work with Pulte to find a solution that provides the maximum number of buildable lots while still retaining the historic building. Attached you will find a site plan that overlays

House of the Seven Gables with the proposed Pulte subdivision layout. (The proposed layout is in BLUE, the existing site survey is in RED and the existing House of the Seven Gables is in ORANGE). The overlay demonstrates that retaining the mansion has minimal impact – only occupying two proposed lots (41 & 42). With minor property line adjustments, the remaining lawn and curve of the road frames the existing house nicely. While we understand that reusing the historic property is “not in Pulte’s wheelhouse,” a second party with historic rehabilitation and historic tax incentive experience could execute an independent project or in cooperation with Pulte.

The Comprehensive Plan states: “The three most important features of Wheaton’s landscape which describe the City’s success are its strong, attractive neighborhoods, historic character, and quality of life.” As Wheaton continues to allow the demolition of historic structures, its attractive character and sense of place are being sadly diminished.

House of the Seven Gables, if properly incorporated in a larger, well-designed development, would be a signature property and a major draw for the Pulte Homes project. This would not be unlike the successful reuse of Wheaton’s former downtown courthouse which today houses some of the most expensive condominiums in the city.

We strongly urge the Board to review all options and work toward a solution that respects the value of this irreplaceable building.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Bonnie McDonald*

Bonnie McDonald  
President

cc: Jim Dzugan, City Manager  
Jim Kozik, Director, Planning Department  
Nancy Flannery, Chair, Historic Commission