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October 10, 2018

Ms. Diane Williams, Chair  
Evanston Preservation Commission  
City of Evanston  
2100 Ridge Avenue  
Evanston, Illinois 60201

**SENT VIA EMAIL**

Re: City of Evanston Certificate of Appropriateness request to demolish  
Harley Clarke Mansion, a designated Evanston Landmark

Dear Chairman Williams and Members of the Commission:

I am writing to you on behalf of Landmarks Illinois, a membership-based nonprofit organization, dedicated to preserving historic properties, such as the Harley Clarke Mansion, for future generations. We urge you to deny the city's request for demolition, submitted to the Commission through a Certificate of Appropriateness on August 31, 2018, of the Harley Clarke Mansion, a designated Evanston Landmark.

We note that the City of Evanston's application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, asserts that "the buildings in their current state present a danger to persons inhabiting or visiting the property" and that "remediating or repairing these requires great difficulty or expense." Yet, there is no evidence included to support this conclusion. More confusing is the fact that the report provided by the City with the Certificate of Appropriateness describes the building as being in "good working order" and the electrical inspection shows minor repairs to comply with the Building Code that are not difficult or expensive. We believe the incongruities in reporting on the condition of the Harley Clarke Mansion necessitate an updated examination and report by appropriate experts. We submitted a request on September 28, 2018 to allow Landmarks Illinois and a select group of expert architects, engineers and assessors to access the Harley Clarke Mansion in order to conduct an examination of the interior and exterior conditions of the building, but this request was denied by the City Council on October 8, 2018.

As you know, in addition to being a designated Evanston Landmark, Harley Clarke is a contributing resource to the Northeast Evanston National Register of Historic Places district. Landmarks Illinois included the Harley Clarke Mansion on our 2016 *Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois* List due to its extraordinary history, architecture and its importance to the city of Evanston and the region. In 2016, Landmarks Illinois provided a pro-bono condition assessment by the firm Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. to the city that verified, while in need of

repairs and improvements, the historic mansion is stable and reusable. We continue to work with local citizen advocates dedicated to finding a reuse solution for this one-of-a-kind building.

Demolition standards 1 and 2 of the City of Evanston Preservation Ordinance contemplate the benefit and welfare of designated landmarks to the residents of Evanston and Illinois. Undeniably, the demolition of the Harley Clarke Mansion will result in unprecedented loss of the city's architectural heritage, especially considering the public ownership of the property, which has historically provided public access and use of this great landmark. Built in 1928, utilities magnate Harley Clarke hired Boston architect Richard Powers to design his three-story home and a nearby coach house in the French Eclectic style with a rough stone exterior, a ballroom on the top floor, and a conservancy on the house's south side. Clarke also hired famed landscape architect Jens Jensen to sculpt the estate grounds and together this powerhouse team of designers created a lakefront estate where architecture and landscape are intrinsically linked. We believe demolition and destruction of this property should not be an option, especially considering its local landmark designation and the fact that the City purchased the property to ensure its preservation. If the city of Evanston demolishes its own designated landmark, this will set a terrible precedent for the future of designated landmarks in Evanston that are presumed to be protected.

In addition to its irreplaceable architecture and landscape design, additional public benefit that preservation of the Harley Clarke Mansion can provide relates to jobs, local economic investment and the environment. Investing in historic places creates more jobs than new construction, or in this case demolition, per dollar spent because it is labor intensive. Preservation rather than demolition prevents otherwise reusable materials, that could never be sourced again, from entering the waste stream. Even deconstruction is not as efficient in the use of material as preservation. Preservation of Harley Clarke contributes to Evanston and the region as a more interesting place in which to live and work and sustains our shared heritage, culture and civic values.

Again, we urge the Preservation Commission to deny the city's request for demolition, especially in light of its unsupported claims that the building is in a life-threatening, dilapidated state. The Harley Clarke Mansion is a mansion for the people and should be protected as such, as a publicly owned local landmark. Its future should be returning it to productive use for the citizens of Evanston.

Sincerely,



Bonnie C. McDonald  
President & CEO

Cc:

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