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People saving places

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February 18, 2020

Board of Commissioners
Freeport Park District
1122 S. Burchard Avenue
Freeport, IL 61032

Re: Oakdale Tabernacle

To the Freeport Park District Board of Commissioners:

On behalf of Landmarks Illinois, I write to address the planned demolition of Oakdale Tabernacle in Freeport. Landmarks Illinois is a membership-based nonprofit organization serving the people of Illinois. We are an on-the-ground advocate, offering technical assistance, practical resources, small grants and access to strategic partnerships to give people the tools they need to save the important places in their lives. In 2018, we called attention to the Oakdale Tabernacle on our Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois and the efforts of Freeport residents working to save the more than century-old community gathering space.

We believe the demolition plans for Oakdale Tabernacle should be put on hold for the following reasons:

1. Demolition review by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Recently, we were able to review the Freeport Park District's submission to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant program. The grant, awarded to Oakdale Nature Preserve in January, makes no mention of the proposed demolition of Oakdale Tabernacle that would happen concurrently or immediately prior to the grant-funded project. While the OSLAD grant does not directly fund demolition of the historic tabernacle, the state's funding for site improvements at Oakdale Nature Preserve will free up Freeport Park District funds needed for demolition at the same site.

In discussions with Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) staff, the omission of information regarding the intended tabernacle demolition renders Freeport Park District's OSLAD application incomplete, placing those grant funds in jeopardy. The Board of Commissioners should place the tabernacle demolition on immediate hold while it consults with OSLAD staff and the State Historic Preservation Office, IDNR.

2. Grant funds not properly explored for Tabernacle reuse

The proposed demolition of the Oakdale Tabernacle comes at a puzzling time, when state grants and funds have been made available at an unprecedented rate

when compared to recent years. The State of Illinois accepted applications in January to the Park and Recreational Facility Construction (PARC) Grant Program, which will award a total of \$25 million through individual grants as high as \$2.5 million. It is only after these funding sources have been properly explored and options exhausted should the Freeport Park District be allocating taxpayer funds for demolition.

3. Public-private partnerships have not been explored

Previous planning documents and comments from the public have indicated a willingness to enter into a public-private partnership in support of the rehabilitation of the tabernacle. Setting a fundraising goal with community members or the establishment of a committee to facilitate a capital campaign are options that could help leverage private dollars to benefit a historic, public building.

4. The tabernacle is structurally sound

There is no reason to rush the public discussion, exploration of alternatives and compliance with state grant provisions because all structural assessments of the tabernacle have concluded that it is in no imminent danger of structural failure or collapse. Spending limited park district funds to place a historic asset in a landfill should be the last resort after all options have been explored.

Again, we believe that the Freeport Park District should place the demolition plans for the Oakdale Tabernacle on hold, especially to properly notify OSLAD grant staff and complete any necessary consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. In addition, we encourage the park district to work with local advocates and organizations like Landmarks Illinois to evaluate alternatives, seek public-private partnerships and leverage grant funding for the tabernacle. The Oakdale Tabernacle is a rare building type in Illinois and can once again be an asset to residents and visitors of Freeport.

Sincerely,



Frank Butterfield
Director, Springfield Office

cc: Bob Appleman, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Dawn Cobb, Office of Realty and Environmental Planning, Illinois Department of Natural Resources
CJ Wallace, Cultural Resource Coordinator, State Historic Preservation Office, Illinois Department
of Natural Resources
Jack Carey, Executive Director, Freeport Park District