



**Testimony to the Will County Board  
August 17, 2023**

**Regarding Resolution 23-269**

By Bonnie McDonald, President & CEO

[bmcdonald@landmarks.org](mailto:bmcdonald@landmarks.org) / Cell: (312) 515-1545

Good Afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the board. My name is Bonnie McDonald and I serve as President & CEO of Landmarks Illinois, a statewide nonprofit organization providing free supportive services, financial resources and technical expertise to local governments and private citizens reusing significant places in their communities.

I am speaking in support of Resolution 23-269 that allows further exploration of reusing the historic Will County Courthouse. We thank the board for considering this important step to gather and consider all of the information before making a final decision on what to do with this publicly owned asset.

The Resolution calls out the reasons to explore reuse:

- That there would be no need to spend the expected \$2 – 5 million dollars of public funds to demolish the courthouse.
- New construction is more time consuming than preservation, especially when it involves demolition, and is therefore, more expensive.
- The county is currently renting space for office functions and it is our understanding that you have identified that you need more space. A reused Will County Courthouse comes online faster than new construction and it is less costly. County services could be consolidated to create greater government efficiency.
- You create more construction jobs per dollar spent with reuse than with new construction because it is more labor intensive.
- And, from an environmental standpoint, reusing this building is the most environmentally responsible thing that we can do. Concrete is a carbon sink locking in all of the carbon spent on its construction. To demolish the courthouse would release that carbon into the atmosphere.
- Additionally, in the process of reuse, the courthouse can be made to be more energy efficient and reduce operational costs in the process

Over my 25 years as a preservation professional, I have seen the many public benefits of reinvesting in historic places that were once seen by some as disposable. Reuse transforms vacant spaces into useful and interesting places to work, live and visit. It increases foot traffic that benefits local businesses. And, reuse inspires others to invest in their own properties, which benefits taxpayers as well. We're seeing this from large communities to small – from Chicago's Old Cook County Hospital to the Macoupin County Courthouse in Carlinville, the Shelbyville Chautauqua Building to the McCauley Schoolhouse in West Chicago.

The responsibility that you carry as publicly elected officials and government representatives is not easy as you weigh the best use of taxpayer resources. I have worked for both city and state government and experienced this firsthand. My best tool was understanding all of my options to ensure that nothing was missed and that no opportunity to provide the best return on investment to the taxpayer was overlooked. Resolution 23-269 does just that – it simply hits pause on pursuing one option when new information has come forward about unexplored options.

I commend the Will County Board for considering Resolution 23-269 and we urge its passage. This non-binding resolution only allows more time for this board, which is entirely different than those making the decision in 2019, to explore all options.

Landmarks Illinois stands as a willing partner to assist the county in its assessment. We have 52 years of experience working with local governments to identify preservation solutions through free expertise and grant resources, so please consider us an asset in your efforts to explore reuse.

Thank you and I will stay in the audience to answer questions after the meeting today.