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November 14, 2016

Mayor Michael J. Gresk and  
Members of the Wheaton City Council  
City of Wheaton  
303 W. Wesley Street  
Wheaton, IL 60187

*RE: Loretto Convent Conceptual Planned Unit Development Review*

Dear Mayor Gresk and Members of the City Council:

It has been brought to our attention that this evening the Council will review a Planned Unit Development proposal for the Loretto Convent property. Landmarks Illinois requests that the Council enables both the Historic Commission and Planning and Zoning Board to thoroughly review this proposal, as the Loretto Convent property, originally the House of Seven Gables and built in 1897, was designed by noted architect Jarvis Hunt and is exceptionally important both architecturally and historically to the city of Wheaton.

The House of the Seven Gables, located at 1600 Somerset Lane (formally 25304 Hawthorne Land), was included on Landmarks Illinois' *Chicagoland Watch List* in 2009 as part of "The Colony at the Chicago Golf Club." We included the Colony on our Watch List that year due to the numerous tear-down threats that were occurring in this historic community – one of the nation's earliest developments of exclusive golf club residences with homes built between 1896 and 1916. As part of a regulatory review with the state historic preservation office (Illinois Historic Preservation Agency – IHPA), Pulte Homes was required to retain an architectural historian to survey these homes prior to any demolition proposal at Loretto because the IHPA views the House of the Seven Gables to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. That report is attached.

We would hope through the planned development process there would be consideration of an historic building's significance and possible reuse as part of a proposed redevelopment. In our experience, many communities would have the Plan and/or Historic Preservation Commission review the significance of the historic property proposed for demolition and work with the developer within the planned development process to consider its possible reuse and incorporation in the project. To ensure a high-quality redevelopment of the property, we are sure other approvals regarding zoning and heritage trees will need to be addressed. The possible reuse of this irreplaceable historic estate home should be part of that consideration. The cities of Chicago and Highland Park, for example, have planned development

policies that encourage a developer to retain and reuse a historic structure. In exchange for reusing historic properties, the developer can receive incentives beneficial to the overall project. We would hope there is an opportunity to explore this option at the Loretto property.

The House of Seven Gables is considered a great example of the high-quality residential design career of Chicago architect Jarvis Hunt, who designed many important residences and buildings, including the Chicago Golf Club clubhouse and significant landmarks such as the train stations in Joliet and Kansas City. It will be a great loss to Wheaton to lose this house or any of the other irreplaceable examples of Hunt's residential architecture in the Colony. There is a market for these homes, and with listing in the National Register of Historic Places, a homeowner, or in this case Pulte, can benefit from the property tax assessment freeze program for the rehabilitation of historic homes. To benefit from the rehabilitation of an estate house like that of Seven Gables, Pulte could accommodate multiple condominium units that would be sold with the tax assessment freeze to first-time buyers – a desirable marketing tool. The House of Seven Gables, if properly incorporated in a larger, well-designed planned development, could be the signature property and a major draw for the Pulte Homes project. This would not be unlike the successful reuse and residential conversion of Wheaton's former downtown courthouse.

We hope the Council will allow a thoughtful planning process regarding the redevelopment of the Loretto property. We strongly urge the Council to allow both the Historic Commission and the Planning and Development Board to review and make recommendations that includes consideration of the historic value of the property before making its final decision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Bonnie McDonald*

Bonnie McDonald  
President

cc: Jim Dzugan, City Manager  
Jim Kozik, Director, Economic Development  
Scott Weller, Chair, Planning and Zoning Board  
Nancy Flannery, Chair, Historic Commission