

To members of the Council:

I am writing to you as a long time resident of Evanston since 1959. I was raised here and worked in the Evanston school District 65. My family has a close attachment to the traditional culture of this city and relishes in its historical chapter in the broader context of the great City of Chicago and its history.

Many have contributed time and effort in helping to shape Evanston and bring it into modernity and keep up with the changing world of technology and new lifestyles that come with young generations that evolve with the city. As Evanston has a unique place in the history of the north shore area, it physically interprets the past through its architecture; the names of its streets, in fact, are old pathways that existed before pavement and brick made them secure for continued passage through time. We walk with pride through this town with memories of our childhood, and the buildings remain as markers of specific moments in memories of many generations. This sense of place is engrained in those who love it and live here over time. Newer towns with their buildings and new streets now being developed and growing quickly will evolve in much the same way as Evanston. They, too, will have their own history that generations to come will enjoy with pride knowing their families come from a place with their contributions and traditions all of which provides a sense of place.

It is with hope that you, as a representative of Evanston residents, realize your role, in part, as protectors of this city's historical place, its culture and its unique contribution to the history of the north shore. This uniqueness embodies history, style, architecture, culture, community, intellectual tradition, innovation and preservation. The annual listing of great losses in historical buildings in Chicago and around the country is testimony to the lack of dedication to preservation on the part of many municipalities. I do not, here, appeal for any one historical structure. Nor do I want to criticize the building presently before the Council for approval. I want to remind you that there is a context within which all architectural structures stand. This community of buildings makes up a whole, an entire language of place that speaks as humanity passes through and subconsciously reads and ultimately feels as "PLACE".

Our current process established by the staff and Council to approve building uses and compliances to zoning and approval of development is far too focused on architecture, height, density, parking, materials and much less on the context of culture, tradition and the relationship to the overall Evanston architectural landscape. Evanston's sense of place is increasingly being eroded by each new architectural element that lacks any reference to the surrounding community. Our design teams exhibit overly ambitious

keenness for design and style and therefore, overlook where it fits in this community that has a unique history and style of its very own. The "oldness" here is often praised and hugely appreciated by those who come here as a destination to live, work and play. Its authenticity is increasingly being replicated throughout the country as developers try to recreate our type of community. I offer The Glen community as an example. Our city, however, is allowing varying and rather mediocre styles of development to overlay our very own established Evanston style while undermining the existing architectural culture. Instead we should be capitalizing on what we have and improving upon it.

This doesn't mean not to include new and innovative architecture in Evanston. It may mean, however, that the ultra modern and hyper-innovative structures should remain on a smaller scale so as not to DOMINATE the existent architectural landscape. We cannot compete with Chicago in architecture and we should not try to replicate Chicago in architectural type. Do we even want to? Are we striving to be part of Chicago? Or, do we offer an alternative? If we are to preserve our history and maintain our difference from the newer suburbs that are developing around Chicago, then we must dedicate ourselves to define and communicate this desire when developers approach the City. We must tell them what we want and proceed from there. If we are compelled to borrow from Chicago a model for Evanston's center, I would suggest the concept be the Webster/Halstead St. area as more in keeping with what fits in Evanston. It combines retail, residential and restaurant/bar life all within a scale that promotes foot traffic, sidewalk activity and animation.

In conclusion, I will provide you with an example of approach in thinking about future development that would greatly satisfy those who are in opposition to the type of development this city is pursuing. I.M. Pei, one of the great modern architects, was asked to create a museum for a large private art collection in Japan. The chosen site was within a sacred nature preserve on a mountain top that has been written about for hundreds of years and conceptualized in Japanese poetry. There were very strict guidelines for the construction but I.M. Pei took on the challenge. He understood the huge responsibility in having to combine the traditional history the site represented with a modern design that would blend the two in harmony with the beauty that surrounded the site. It was a very difficult endeavor but he maintained awareness of Japanese tradition of nature and architecture and the rich references to the cultural legends of the land throughout the process. The end result is this beautiful blend of modern design that is integrated into the mountain both above ground and below. There was no compromise to the landscape and beauty of the site and even less compromise in the innovative, highly modern concept of the design. The most beautiful aspect of the project is the approach to the museum which is on foot through a tunnel that opens onto a bridge that one must cross to enter the museum. History, modernity, cultural context, innovation, tradition and scale, are all

encapsulated in this one structure. It can be done and we should make this kind of thoughtful approach to all we do in the fair city of Evanston. Let Evanston be the "mountain".

I appeal to you to provide leadership in the future of Evanston in this period of development of its city center.

Sincerely,

Beth Steffen
418 Dempster St.
Evanston, Il 60202