

**SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORIANS**

26 August 2019

Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
Village of Oak Park
Village Hall
123 Madison St.
Oak Park, IL 60302
historicpreservation@oak-park.us

Oak Park Village Board
Village of Oak Park
Village Hall
123 Madison St.
Oak Park, IL 60302
board@oak-park.us

Re: Opposition of the demolition of all or portions of buildings on the site of the proposed Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio Visitors Center

Dear Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission and Oak Park Village Board:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) opposes the demolition of all or portions of buildings on the site of the proposed Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio Visitors Center.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, stewards of the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio in Oak Park, IL, proposes to construct a new visitor's center to welcome and educate the interested public. While the SAH supports this necessary initiative, it cannot and will not support the Trust's plan to demolish part or all of other buildings on the site as part of the construction project. The buildings, located at 931 and 935 Chicago Avenue, were present at the time Wright designed his home on Forest Avenue, and are a necessary part of the landscape of Wright's early designs. 931 Chicago Avenue was owned by Wright's mother, while Wright lived and worked next door. It is not certain that the additions currently proposed for demolition were designed by Wright, but their removal would also destroy any opportunity to determine a connection. The SAH notes that the Trust has already applied for a certificate of appropriateness, making your decision that much more urgent.

Both buildings are considered contributing resources to the larger Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District, nationally recognized as representative of Wright's long and transformative career. At this time, the existence of the historic district provides the only legal framework for protection of this iconic assemblage of buildings. Allowing the demolition of contributing structures weakens this framework, endangering many more Wright-designed buildings in the process. It also threatens the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Unity Temple, which is buffered in part by the District. Oak Park's historic preservation ordinance is truly the barricade that stands between these irreplaceable resources and decisions that threaten their integrity.

The buildings at 931 and 935 Chicago Avenue are subordinate to the Home and Studio and to other Wright-designed buildings within the historic district, but their presence provides necessary context to both Wright's designs and his life and career. Their demolition, even in part, diminishes a district of international importance. The SAH joins other local and national preservation organizations in opposing the move or demolition of these buildings and encourages the Trust to identify alternatives that allow the preservation of Wright's landscape in its entirety.

The Society of Architectural Historians joins with the Frank Lloyd Wright Conservancy, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Landmarks Illinois, and a coalition of Oak Park preservationists to oppose to proposed move or demolition of these two historic buildings, and urges the Frank Lloyd Trust to revise its plans for a new visitors center to retain the historic portions of both of these buildings that give context to Wright's Home and Studio.

Sincerely,

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Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

cc: Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Ms. Phyllis Ellin; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA;
Mr. Sandy Isenstadt, Ph.D.; Mr. Theodore Pruden, Ph.D., FAIA; Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Members SAH
Heritage Conservation Committee.