

23 February 2021

Mr. Stephen J. Gardner
President, Amtrak
National Railroad Passenger Corporation
60 Massachusetts Ave NE
Washington, DC 20002-4285
stephen.gardner@amtrak.com

Mr. William J. Flynn
Chief Executive Officer, Amtrak
National Railroad Passenger Corporation
60 Massachusetts Ave NE
Washington, DC 20002-4285
bill.flynn@amtrak.com

Re: Proposed Demolition of the Union Station Power House, Chicago, IL

Dear Mr. Gardner and Mr. Flynn:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) strongly opposes the proposed demolition of the Union Station Power House, Chicago.

The Union Station Power Plant was designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, which was not only the descendent form of D.H. Burnham and Co, but also the firm that designed many of Chicago's most significant buildings, including Wrigley Field, the Merchandise Mart, and the Field Building. The Power House is part of a larger complex of buildings, systems, and rails designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst & White, including Union Station itself. Disused since 2011, it is now slated for demolition.

Chicago's rise to economic prominence was largely the result of the national network of rail lines that converged in the city. This vast rail network transported raw materials such as coal, manufactured good including iron and steel, and agricultural products including wheat, corn, grain, and animals, connecting Chicago with the rest of the United States. Chicago's commanding location at the hub of this network was essential to its prosperity.

Graham, Anderson, Probst & White's Union Station complex moved many of these goods, as well as vast numbers of passengers. The Power House was not designed as a mere service building to power the complex. Rather, through austere and masterful Art Deco detailing, it expressed its own civic role while complementing the more traditional classical design of Union Station itself. By its own design it confirmed that all architecture - be it civic, commercial, or industrial - was part of a larger civic order, within which service buildings performed an important, and even indispensable, civic function.

Amtrak, currently engaged in Section 106 review, has consistently advocated for demolition, and has made no proposals that include adaptive reuse of the building. While admittedly challenging, a creative adaptive reuse could result in a great variety of vital new uses.

The Society of Architectural Historians joins our colleagues at Preservation Chicago in strong opposition to the demolition of the Union Station Power House, and encouraging a thoughtful investigation of alternative uses for this iconic building.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B C G' followed by a horizontal line.

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; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Ms. Priya Jain, AIA; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Ms. Victoria Young, Ph.D.; Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee; Mr. Ward Miller, Executive Director, Preservation Chicago.