



May 19, 2021

Honorable Detroit City Council:

As the city's largest preservation organization, Preservation Detroit thanks you for the opportunity to offer our thoughts on The Parade Company's proposed redevelopment of the R. Thornton Brodhead Armory.

In the nearly two decades since the Brodhead closed, the building has been a victim of vandalism, theft, and deterioration from neglect caused by a lack of resources to properly safeguard this building's architectural and cultural treasures. Attempts to redevelop the Brodhead Armory in the past have been unsuccessful and The Detroit Parade Company's proposal is likely our best chance to save any portion of this historic landmark. As preservation advocates, we believe the Brodhead Armory must be saved and redeveloped and commend The Parade Company for its efforts to bring new life to this space. Detroit cannot wait any longer to take action on the Brodhead.

We recommend a preservation-minded approach to this very important historic resource for any sale and redevelopment effort. The goal is to save as much of the building's exterior and interior that is feasible and appropriate for the benefit of all Detroiters and visitors. We have toured the building and have issued a public statement on the preservation of the Brodhead, included as an addendum to this letter, which includes specific recommendations on a preservation-minded approach. It is clear that timing is critical to save any portion of the Brodhead Armory and its WPA artwork. We must act now.

We also applaud the city's efforts in fully exploring the proposal brought forth by the Brodhead Association and veterans group. While this proposal had great merit in thoughtfully preserving the Brodhead Armory, unfortunately, they could not provide financial details supporting proven financial support and fundraising capacity, as indicated by the City Planning Commission recommendation. It is in the best interest of the future of the Brodhead Armory to sell to a recipient that does have the financial capacity to redevelop the historic site.

We fully support the resolution to amend the Future General Land Use map of the Detroit Master Plan of Policies for the Indian Village area of Neighborhood Cluster 3 for the portion of Gabriel Richard Park containing the Brodhead Naval Armory. The proposed Master Plan change is required for this City-owned property to be sold or leased, regardless of recipient, making it possible to be rehabilitated and redeveloped.

In response to our public statement on the Brodhead and a preservation-minded approach, The Parade Company has directly addressed our concerns and a letter from that organization is included as an addendum. Therefore, we support the resolution for property sale by development agreement of the Brodhead Armory to The Parade Company with the caveat that our recommendations for a preservation-minded approach be considered and incorporated in good faith, as outlined in the addendum. We have also created recommended language to be included in any sale and development agreement. This will ensure that specialized experts are a part of the redevelopment effort, and we trust



that the oversight of the City of Detroit Historic District Commission will further safeguard the Brodhead as its new future is created.

Preservation Detroit commends The Parade Company for its commitment to the city and its vision for reactivating the historic Brodhead. We believe its plan will be another hallmark destination for Detroit's Riverfront and will mean a new life for this old landmark. Obviously, we believe that saving part of the Brodhead is better than saving nothing at all, and we do not want to jeopardize this project. It is important to note, however, that just as Detroit has a lot to gain from The Parade Company's planned redevelopment, we also stand the chance of losing something valuable, as well, unless the preservation of the historic murals is prioritized.

Sincerely,

Melanie A. Markowicz
Vice President | Board of Directors

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Public Statement on the Preservation of the R. Thornton Brodhead Armory March 31, 2021

As the city's largest preservation organization, Preservation Detroit is providing a statement on the preservation of the R. Thornton Brodhead Armory, located at 7600 E. Jefferson Avenue in Detroit, Michigan. We would like to provide clarity and share the factual reality of the condition of the building, historic integrity, and feasibility for preservation and redevelopment. We recommend a preservation-minded approach to this very important historic resource for any sale and redevelopment effort. The goal is to save as much of the building's exterior and interior that is feasible and appropriate for the benefit of all Detroiters and visitors.

The Brodhead Armory is historically significant for its association with Detroit's Naval Militia community, who supported its creation in 1930, and is architecturally significant as an art deco and art moderne structure. Brodhead Armory houses the largest collection of federally-funded Depression-era artwork of any building in the State of Michigan. The Armory was designated a Michigan State Historic Site in 1980 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. It was individually designated as a local building of historic significance by the City of Detroit in 2001, also carrying an uncommon interior designation. The interior spaces of the R. Thornton Brodhead Armory which are locally designated include the main drill hall, the third floor mess hall, wardroom, and officer's bar, and the formal staircase from floors one to three. The character-defining features that warranted and are included in the designation for these spaces specifically include surfaces such as woodwork and wood carvings, fresco paintings and murals, floor surfaces, ceilings, and permanent fixtures including light fixtures. Areas not subject to consideration in the designation include the interiors of offices, adjoining hallways, rooms adjacent to the drill hall, restrooms, and other areas such as the basement, garages, fourth floor spaces, attic areas, and service areas.

In the nearly two decades since the Brodhead closed, the building has been a victim of vandalism, theft, and deterioration from neglect caused by a lack of resources to properly safeguard this building's architectural and cultural treasures. We understand that multiple attempts to redevelop the Brodhead Armory in the past have been unsuccessful and that recent proposals are likely the best chance to save any portion of this historic landmark. As preservation advocates, we believe the Brodhead Armory must be saved and redeveloped. Detroit cannot wait any longer to take action on the Brodhead.

Preservation Detroit has been in discussion with the City of Detroit to inject a preservation-minded approach to any sale and redevelopment of the Brodhead Armory. As part of that effort, a tour of the interior of the Brodhead Armory by the historic preservation community was conducted and Preservation Detroit assessed the building's existing interior conditions and extant character-defining features. A summary of our professional observations is below.

We observed that the main drill hall in the north section of the Brodhead Armory has few interior character-defining features, aside from the magnificent exterior. This large open space is supported by an exposed subdivided Pratt truss support system. Two of the southernmost trusses have collapsed and



miscellaneous bridging and x-braces were illegally removed, causing a partial roof collapse at the south end of the drill hall. There is a large hole in the roof in this area which leaves the drill hall open to the elements and continued moisture damage. Despite this partial collapse, the rehabilitation of the north block appears feasible, and the structural integrity of the building has been examined through a Phase I Structural Condition Assessment completed by Desai/Nasr Consulting Engineers, highlighting required intervention.

We observed that the majority of the character-defining features that were part of the interior historic designation and significance of the Brodhead Armory are no longer extant, with the exception of the WPA murals. The majority of features have been scrapped, stolen, and been subject to the elements and years of water damage. This has compromised the majority of the south block and we recognize the extremely poor condition of this section. The main staircase reaching three floors, for example, was once adorned with an oak bannister beautifully carved with sea creatures, plants, and mermaids. One hundred percent of this carved woodwork on the staircase has been stolen and none remains. Likewise, all woodwork carvings above and around doorways have been illegally removed. All wooden doors which had decorative carving insets depicting historic ships, herald crests, and significant persons in Detroit history have all been stolen with the exception of one single door. A ship's steel bulkhead that was incorporated into the base of the main staircase remains extant with a high degree of rust. The office spaces and basement are in extremely poor condition, with a high degree of deterioration, and major water damage throughout and continuing. The gymnasium to the west with an arched roof appears to be in relatively good condition comparatively. The structural integrity and viability of the southern block is unknown. We also observed that the configuration of the office areas renders any future reuse extremely challenging.

Despite these devastating losses and continued building deterioration, the Brodhead's Depression-era WPA murals remain extant as the most significant character-defining feature, completed between 1936 and 1941. Carved bas reliefs depicting sailors' everyday activities remain in the south block's first floor office entrance area (Gustav Hilebrand, assisted by James Johnson). The third floor wardroom, the officer's dining room, has a sixty-foot plaster al fresco mural portraying experiences aboard ship (David Fredenthal). The officer's bar has a smaller al fresco mural depicting sailors relaxing in an outdoor scene (David Fredenthal). The mess hall, adjacent to the wardroom, has murals on all four walls applied to a canvas plaster applique depicting ships, deck fittings, masts, and lines (Edgar Yaeger). All murals remain extant, with varying degrees of deterioration including water damage, efflorescence, cracking, delamination, and small sections removed.

It is clear that timing is critical to save any portion of the Brodhead Armory and its WPA artwork. Preservation Detroit has recommended the following to the City of Detroit:

- A professional historic preservationist must be part of any redevelopment effort at the Brodhead Armory, meeting the Secretary of the Interior Professional Qualification Standards 36 CFR Part 61 in Historic Architecture and Architectural History. This is essential and a basic standard.
- The condition and safeguarding of the extant WPA murals and bas reliefs should be examined by a professional conservator to determine what is feasible for their preservation. We underscore the importance of having these works of art professionally assessed for the feasibility, viability,



and financial support that would be required to safeguard these works of art. These are the most important element of the entire complex that remain, aside from the exterior. The interpretation of these as a group with context of the WPA for public display and access on the site is very important. We also note that onsite interpretation and endowment for care is critical. We seek a concrete plan for these artworks, and one which honors the story of this historic site.

- Because the north block open space served as a drill room, any programmatic use and construction should retain this open floor concept.
- The one wood office door with carved insignia remaining should be retained onsite and incorporated into the redevelopment.
- We propose that dependent on further conditions assessment outcomes, that a portion(s) of the south building be reconsidered for rehabilitation that creatively retains and safeguards extant character-defining features in-situ.
- Any sale and redevelopment proposal for the Brodhead Armory should have proven financial support and fundraising capacity.

Preservation Detroit looks forward to continuing to provide constructive feedback on the potential sale and redevelopment of the Brodhead Armory in support of reactivating this cultural gem and breathing new life into this historic resource. Obviously, we believe that saving part of the Brodhead is better than saving nothing at all. It is important to note, however, that just as Detroit has a lot to gain from redevelopment, we also stand the chance of losing something valuable, as well, unless the preservation of the historic murals is prioritized.

Sincerely,

Melanie A. Markowicz
Director | Board of Directors



**Recommended Language to be Considered in the Sale and Redevelopment
Agreement for the R. Thornton Brodhead Armory
May 13, 2021**

- The redevelopment team shall include a professional historic preservationist who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards 36 CFR Part 61 in Historic Architecture.
- The redevelopment of the Brodhead Armory's north block shall be completed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation for both the interior and exterior, subject to the oversight of the City of Detroit Historic District Commission.
- Any programmatic use of the north block drill room area shall retain the existing open floor concept.
- A full conditions assessment will be undertaken which includes a structural assessment of the southern block and feasibility of rehabilitating the southern block or a portion thereof with particular attention to the gymnasium, main staircase, and third floor wardroom, mess hall, and officer's bar areas.
- Based on the outcomes of conditions assessments and full due diligence, a sincere consideration for a portion(s) of the southern block to be rehabilitated as part of the development will be undertaken that creatively retains and safeguards extant character-defining features in-situ.
- Extant historic wood doors and the steel bulkhead, as extant character-defining features in the southern block, will be reincorporated into the development if they cannot be retained in situ. All other extant interior historic character-defining features in the southern block will also be reincorporated into the development onsite if they cannot be retained in situ. All subject to the oversight of the City of Detroit Historic District Commission.
- The developer shall hire a qualified professional art conservator to assess the feasibility, viability, and financial support required to preserve all four WPA mural and bas relief artworks located in the southern block including the bas reliefs on the first floor, and murals located in the third floor wardroom, mess hall, and officer's bar. The retention of the professional art conservator team shall be approved by the City of Detroit in consultation with experts.
- The developer will preserve and restore the WPA murals and bas reliefs to the fullest extent possible as determined by the professional art conservator's assessment.
- Based on the outcomes of the professional art conservator's assessment, if deemed necessary, appropriate, and feasible to move the artworks from their original location in the southern block, all four WPA artworks will be relocated onsite to be interpreted as a group and accessible by the public.
- Interpretation of the WPA artworks and the history of the site shall be undertaken by a qualified historian who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards 36 CFR Part 61 in History.



May 14, 2021

Preservation Detroit
P.O. Box 6624
Detroit, MI 48202

Re: Parade Company's response to Preservation Detroit's Statement on the Preservation of the R. Thornton Brodhead Armory

To the Board of Directors of Preservation Detroit,

The Parade Company acknowledges and understands the importance and values the historical significance of the R. Thornton Brodhead Armory. We are committed to a preservation-minded approach to its redevelopment. We will honor the Brodhead's legacy through thoughtfully incorporating its history through the preservation of its WPA murals, remaining artifacts, and character-defining features remaining on both the interior and exterior. Historical interpretation will be done through a professionally exhibit onsite, accessible to the public, and retaining as much of the artwork in the building as possible.

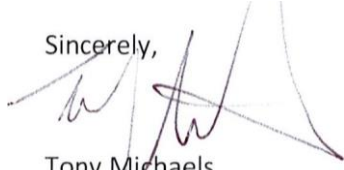
We acknowledge and support Preservation Detroit's recommended course to evaluate and pursue the preservation of the Brodhead Armory. We are committed to engaging the necessary professionals who will appropriately recommend and implement the preservation strategy, prioritizing the preservation of the historical murals along with the building itself. We welcome your continued advice and recommendations as we seek to be stewards of this significant building.

The Parade Company currently has a qualified Historic Architect who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards 36 CFR Part 61 on their team. Additionally, the Parade Company will obtain high-level consultation and advice from the Detroit Institute of Arts on the preservation of the four WPA murals, frescos, and bas reliefs, as well as other architectural elements and will advise the company on next steps in identifying conservators who could take on this highly specialized work. The professional conservator will assess for the feasibility, viability, and financial support that would be required to safeguard these works of art.

Our current plans for the northern block reflect a similar desire for the open floor plan as suggested. Additionally, the remaining artifacts of significance, including the carved wood door, Pewabic tiles, and memorial plaques will be incorporated into the redevelopment of the building.

It is an honor to serve the residents of Detroit and neighboring communities through our annual curation of the Thanksgiving Parade and world class events. We look forward to bringing the same level of commitment and enthusiasm to the redevelopment and preservation of the Brodhead Armory.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Tony Michaels', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Tony Michaels
President & CEO

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