

HISTORIC SAINT PAUL

October 31, 2022

Members of the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission
C/O Mr. George Gause, Heritage Preservation Commission Supervisor
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Commissioners and Heritage Preservation Staff,

On behalf of Historic Saint Paul, we urge the Heritage Preservation Commission to deny the permit application for the demolition of the Justus Ramsey House at 252 West 7th Street, Saint Paul, MN.

As a nonprofit in the Capitol City with a mission to “preserve and promote the cultural heritage, character, and vitality of Saint Paul neighborhoods” we believe that the proposed destruction of this property will adversely impact our collective ability to interpret and educate the public about powerful aspects of Saint Paul’s development and cultural heritage.

History is complicated, and the Justus Ramsey House has a complicated story to tell. It relates to the earliest land transactions in the city – with names that include Irvine, Sibley, Rice, and Ramsey. It is an opportunity to discuss and learn from how those transactions came about and how the settlement that followed resulted in the forced removal of the Dakota people from their ancestral homeland. It allows us to reflect on how property is often recognized for its association with White landowners vs. the stories of working people who lived there and labored to build the city and serve its growing populace. It is an opportunity to tell the story of how free Black and formerly enslaved people came to Saint Paul seeking work and entrepreneurial opportunities and established roots for the early Black community, including in the West 7th neighborhood. It relates to the story of how some in that Black community were displaced by a public works project, and the subsequent evaporation of that history in our collective memory. It is representative of how a desire for intensified development can create an environment where city leadership turns away from the responsibility to preserve structures that embody our stories, and how the mechanisms that have been installed to protect and preserve them can be tested.

There is no question that the Justus Ramsey House is a structure with architectural and historical merit. In addition to the above associations, it is on the National Register of Historic Places and has twice been locally designated by the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission and City Council. It retains a majority of the National Park Service’s seven aspects of historic integrity including materials, design, feeling, location, association, workmanship, and setting. Current concerns regarding its condition do not eliminate its historic integrity or ability to convey its significance.

Although recent destructive developments on the site have compromised the physical condition of the building it has been determined by professionals with considerable experience preserving historic buildings that the damage is not irreversible and recommendations for the building to be shored up and repaired have been outlined.

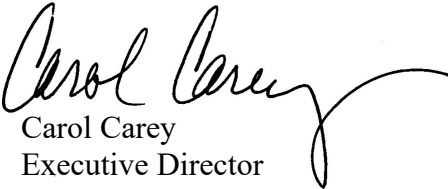
The report further went on to identify specific places where the observed deterioration does not correlate with natural deterioration mechanisms. Granting a demolition permit at this time would establish a precedent tantamount to endorsing a demolition by neglect (or worse) approach related to the ownership and stewardship of Saint Paul's heritage resources.

There is currently a cross section of stakeholders working to identify strategies that would allow the Justus Ramsey House to continue to represent a tangible physical connection to the unique cultural history associated with it and represent a more comprehensive version of the development and cultural heritage of Saint Paul. The path to achieving those goals begins with denial of the demolition permit.

We ask the Heritage Preservation Commission deny the demolition permit application.

Thank you for your consideration and for the work you do on the community's behalf.

Sincerely,



Carol Carey
Executive Director