April 24, 2020

Statement regarding the potential demolition of two High Merit components of the campus of the Forest Park Community College (1964-1969) designed by Modernist architect, Harry Weese, FAIA (1915-1998) and landscape architect Dan Kiley (1912-2004)

We, the Board of Directors of the Society of Architectural Historians St. Louis and Missouri Valley Chapters, wish to express our grave concern regarding the potential demolition of Towers A and B of the Saint Louis Community College – Forest Park.

The Saint Louis Community College – Forest Park was designed and constructed between 1964 and 1969 as an integrated, modern campus by acclaimed modernist architect Harry Weese, FAIA, along with younger brother Ben Weese, FAIA, and Dan Kiley (1912-2004), one of the most important and influential Modernist landscape architects of the 20th century. The 35-acre Forest Park site, intended to house 7,000 full-time day students, was organized as a four-story complex arranged along two horizontal spines which framed a series of outdoor landscaped courtyards.

Of note, these buildings and campus were listed on the Expanded Significant Properties List in the Thematic Survey of Modern Movement: Non-Residential Architecture, 1945 - 1975, in St. Louis City, prepared for the City of Saint Louis Cultural Resources Office, City of Saint Louis, Missouri (July 31st, 2013). The report stated that “The “Expanded” Significant Properties List was created by filtering through the RLS properties to find a selection of properties that appeared to meet the necessary level of integrity to be considered eligible for listing on the National Register, that offered some degree of geographic diversity across the city, and that offered a cross-section of building types or uses. The properties represent a good example of a mid-century or post-war architectural style or building type, whether high-style or vernacular in its expression.”

In 1994, Harry Weese & Associates’ design for Forest Park Community College won the first ever 25-Year Award bestowed by the American Institute of Architects, St. Louis Chapter for buildings that have “withstood the test of time.”

Harry Weese’s legacy is one of great modern architecture across our nation. He is also known for his preservation efforts and advocacy to preserve our built history. We should do no less in advocating for the preservation of this most important design for higher education in our own community.

We understand that the Cultural Resources Office Preservation Board will hold a video conference meeting on Monday, April 27, 2020 at 4:00 P.M. to review a request by the Junior College District of St. Louis for the demolition of Buildings A and B on Saint Louis Community College – Forest Park Campus at 5600 Oakland Avenue (Ward 17).

Given the nature of this consequential decision, we ask that this meeting be postponed and rescheduled at a later date to allow for full public participation, as mandated by statute.

Respectfully Submitted,

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President, Board of Directors
Society of Architectural Historians St. Louis and Missouri Valley Chapters