

# Frieze Frame

Better capital planning could save building, enhance campus

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BY JEREMIAH MASON

Since coming to the University of Michigan, I have become increasingly concerned about the capital planning process at the university. The announcement last month that the Frieze Building will be demolished to make way for the new proposed "North Quad" convinced me that my fears are not unfounded. Michigan has a long tradition of demolishing its historic structures, but with the recent rehabilitation and restoration of a number of historic buildings on campus, including Hill Auditorium, the Rackham Graduate School, Angell Hall, West Hall, and the Perry Building, to name a few, I had happily thought that this trend was being reversed.

Unfortunately, the university now seems to be reverting to its old ways in regard to the Frieze Building.

There is no doubt that the Frieze provides a sub-standard learning and work environment in its current condition, and that rehabilitation would be expensive. However, if you take the long view, like a long-term investor, rehabilitation of the building would yield a better return on the university's capital investment than new construction. (The economic advantages of historic preservation are well-documented in preservation literature.) In essence, rehabilitating the Frieze Building would yield greater value for the money spent.

Preservation is also more sustainable than new construction in such a case, because there is so much waste inherent in the demolition of any building, especially in one the size of the Frieze.

The building has suffered significantly from past historically unsympathetic interior renovations, but much fabric worthy of preservation remains intact. Certainly the exterior deserves to be restored, and some aspects of the interior do as well. Consider the Trueblood Theater: Enough of the historic features of the Trueblood remain intact that it could be restored to its original proscenium-with-balcony configuration relatively easily. If restored, the

Trueblood would undoubtedly become a gem of an on-campus performance venue/movie theater. (It could, perhaps, become the proposed Arthur Miller Theater.)

It is even possible that an adaptive-reuse program could be developed for the Frieze that incorporates the same living and learning concept proposed for the new North Quad. Creative solutions developed for such a project could make it a model for institutions around the world, and in the field of historic preservation.

The proposed demolition of the building demonstrates an unfortunate lack of foresight and disregard for the past that is symptomatic of a more broad and equally unfortunate disregard for comprehensive capital planning at U-M. The existing campus master plan, developed in 1997, is valuable for its overall perspective, but was never fully fleshed out. In its current state, it is so lacking in detailed recommendations it is almost useless for any real planning efforts.

What's more, the recommendations it does make are too easily disregarded. (It does in fact recommend rehabilitation and selective

restoration of the Frieze Building.)

Capital planning issues involve too much money and will have too great of an impact on the university community for too long of a time to be subject to the whims of whoever happens to be president of the institution at any given time. I would challenge President Mary Sue Coleman to draw on the vast resources of talent available in the university community (such as in the Urban Planning Department, perhaps) and establish a capital planning committee to work with the campus planner in the Plant Extension Department to oversee the continued development of a comprehensive master plan for the university.

When plans for a new housing facility on campus were first announced, I was flabbergasted that the site for the new facility was as yet unknown. With a truly comprehensive master plan in place, recommended sites for the next six housing facilities on campus would already be known and prioritized. That is not to say that such a master plan would be wholly inflexible,

W.G.

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