

## **Shaker Heights Landmark Commission**

### **Statement on the Preservation of Shaker Heights Public Buildings**

The Shaker Heights Landmark Commission (SHLC) holds as one of its duties to “work for the continuing education of the residents of the City with respect to the historical and architectural heritage of the City” (Landmark Ordinance, 137.07). From City Hall to the library, to the schools, Shaker’s public buildings represent the legacy of thoughtful planning, enduring design, and meaningful investment.

Generations of civic leaders have served as stewards of the city’s public buildings by preserving, maintaining, and investing in them. Each subsequent generation, including our own, bears the same responsibility. This is not for simply nostalgic or academic reasons. This responsibility extends to sound fiscal practices and sustainability. Improper or irresponsible stewardship of these structures could result in serious consequences that include misspent funds, inappropriate and harmful repairs, and a waste of the embodied energy of Shaker’s historical public buildings.

As such, the SHLC supports the following values with regards to the city’s historical public buildings, including its city and community buildings, library buildings, and city schools: fiscal responsibility, sustainability and efficiency, architectural legacy, and dedication to building a vibrant, diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

The SHLC values the **fiscal responsibility** inherent in maintaining and preserving our historical public buildings. There are many examples of public entities maintaining their public buildings:

- The City of Elyria restored their 1867 city hall and designed sensitive additions that both preserved the city’s history and provided citizens with a modern facility.
- Several school districts, including Cleveland Heights, have successfully upgraded historical schools with modern systems, technology, and additions to provide high-quality learning environments.
- The superintendent of Chicago Public Schools has publicly stated that rehabilitating that city’s historical schools was the fiscally responsible choice.
- Closer to home, the City of Lakewood worked with their community and made a conscious decision to renovate their historical schools and saved over \$1 million by focusing on renovation for many of their buildings.

These examples prove that communities like ours can both **dream big** and preserve their architectural legacies. Many communities are misled that new buildings save money only to find that many new structures do not age well and become obsolete and a drain on public resources, particularly compared to early 20th century buildings. Time and again, historical architecture, building materials and design stand the test of time and are capable of evolving and adapting with society. With thoughtful investment using qualified architects and contractors who have demonstrated expertise with older structures, Shaker’s historical public buildings will serve our community today, as **21st century facilities**, and beyond for another one hundred years. It is now our generation’s responsibility to make a meaningful investment in our community’s legacy as we have benefitted from decisions made by previous generations. To make shortsighted decisions today will only give future generations the financial burden of correcting our mistakes.

The SHLC values our historical public buildings as **sustainable resources** that contribute to the city’s economic, social, and environmental viability. The Shaker Heights community espouses sustainability as a core value. Sustainability demands that public officials take a long-range view when making decisions about what we have inherited from the past and what we pass down to future generations. The residents of Shaker Heights are fortunate to have inherited buildings designed to last, not just to reflect current trends. The city’s buildings

were built with materials that have endured for a century and, with proper maintenance, will endure for another century. The locations of many of our public buildings, particularly our schools, encourage students and community members to walk and bike, thus reducing congestion and our reliance on buses. Investing in the embodied energy in our historical public buildings will preserve Shaker Heights' walkability and improve the city from a sustainability perspective.

The **unique architectural legacy** of our historical public buildings, which were handed down to us from prior generations, is well established. The city's public buildings are contributing resources to the Shaker Village Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. The SHLC values the preservation of this legacy and strongly recommends that public entities utilize qualified architects and contractors who have demonstrated expertise with older structures in the ongoing maintenance of historical public buildings and all current and future planning efforts. Such expertise can provide insight on how to properly maintain older public buildings, how to retrofit these buildings with modern systems and technology, and how to adapt their footprints to accommodate modern facility requirements and environments while **enhancing performance and improving efficiency**. When this expertise is lacking, the results can include deferred or inappropriate maintenance that does more harm than good in the long run, ultimately sliding towards demolition by neglect. The Shaker community has expressed its support of high-quality public facilities and the SHLC advocates maintaining healthy, safe, and modern facilities within our existing public buildings.

Finally, the SHLC values the numerous **community** benefits that our historical public buildings provide. Shaker Heights' architecture is an attractive feature for many people who choose to call our community home. To maintain our competitiveness as a **magnet community**, we need to build upon and reinvest in the uniqueness of Shaker Heights, including its architecturally significant public buildings. We have an opportunity to provide current and future generations with public spaces, including schools, libraries and community facilities that are timeless, beautiful, and modern. In doing so, we will strengthen Shaker as an **enduring place** and provide a foundation to promote our community's viability for another century.

The first generation of leaders of Shaker Heights made thoughtful and purposeful decisions about the placement of public buildings based on the garden city movement, which locates public buildings and green spaces as neighborhood anchors. Access to schools, commercial areas, and other public facilities reinforces both **accessibility and diversity, equity, and inclusion** in our community. Further, walking and biking throughout the city builds and strengthens our community. The SHLC supports reinvesting in our public buildings in a way that proactively provides amenities such as community and recreational facilities connected through multimodal infrastructure that improves the quality of life for Shaker residents and businesses and enhances the city's competitiveness for future generations.

The SHLC is charged with providing education regarding the values inherent in our historical public buildings and the Commission is prepared to provide resources, expertise, and professional networks to facilitate and support maintenance and renovation that will allow the modern renovation and evolution of these unique **Shaker assets**. Most of the city's public buildings have housed, educated, and served the Shaker community for 100 years and, with proper thoughtful planning and investment, will continue to serve future generations. It is our responsibility to steward the resources handed down to us and to reinvest in those resources for generations to come. At this moment in time, we have the unique opportunity to think beyond today's financial bottom line and commit to a new hundred-year investment that respects the past and paves the way for a vibrant future. Renovating our public buildings, including sensitive adaptation, modernization, and additions, is the sustainable and fiscally responsible choice. Our historical public buildings and the legacy that we have inherited are not disposable. It is our responsibility to steward this legacy.