

	HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY			
	Agenda Item Title/Address:	Letters regarding COA: 1 E Main St		
	Significance:	Non-contributing		
	Petitioner:			
	Project Type:	Façade Work		
	PUBLIC HEARING		MEETING 1/20/21	X
Agenda Item Category:				
	Preliminary Review		Grant	
X	Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)		Other Commission Business	
	Landmark/District Designation		Commission Business	
Attached Documents:			Additional Requested Documents:	
Letters				
Project Description:				
<p>Due to COVID 19 precautions, the 1/20/21 Historic Preservation meeting is being conducted via Zoom. In response to viewing the proposed plans for the 1 E Main St, façade project, several people have submitted letters to be read aloud at the meeting. The following letters will be read during the meeting and presented to the Commission for comments.</p>				
Staff Comments:				
Recommendation / Suggested Action:				



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January 18, 2021

The history of St. Charles can be told through its buildings. Having my historic preservation architecture practice in St. Charles for over thirty-two years allowed me to proudly enhance this history with dozens of projects such as the Hotel Baker, the Arcada Theater, the St. Charles Municipal Building, the Old Church Inn, the historic Beith House and the St. Charles History Museum, to name a few.



In 1994, I directed our office, Dixon Associates, in the development of an “Architectural Survey” for the City of St. Charles. Buildings were classified in that moment in time regarding their architectural significance with reference to the National Register of Historic Places guidelines. Per these guidelines, “in order to qualify for historic designation, a building must be at least 50 years old, must retain a high degree of integrity and have some level of historic significance.”

Several reference books were used in the development of the Dixon Associates’ survey in 1994, including *What Style is It? A Guide to American Architecture* (1983) by architectural historians John Poppeliers, S. Allen Chambers and Nancy Schwartz and *A Field Guide to American Architecture* (1980) by architectural historian Carole Rifkind. Neither book makes reference to Mid-Century Modern which is the term we would now call the building at 1 East Main Street in St. Charles. While Mid-Century Modern is an American design movement that was popular from roughly 1945 to 1969, the term was not actually commonly used until the late 1980’s. It is

now recognized by scholars worldwide as a significant design movement typically characterized by clean, simple lines, an honest use of materials and it generally does not include decorative embellishments. The building at 1 East Main Street in St. Charles can definitely now be classified as Mid-Century Modern.

Keep in mind that, in 1994, the time of the Dixon Associates' Architectural Survey, the 1 East Main Street building was only 29 years old and did not yet meet the requirements of the National Register of Historic Places. Today the building is over 50 years old and would qualify as a historic Mid-Century Modern structure. Architectural Surveys such as the one which we prepared in 1994 should be updated at least every 20 years to re-evaluate the significance ratings. The building at 1 East Main Street now meets all the criteria to be a Mid-Century Modern structure being a well maintained, significant historic structure with a high degree of integrity with regard to the distinctive characteristics of a type, period and method of construction.

Another important aspect of the building at 1 East Main Street concerns its architect of note, Robert J. Cantrell, who maintained an architectural practice in St. Charles from 1960 until 1970. He moved to St. Charles Township in 1949 and had been involved with encouraging Kane County to develop Randall Road as he owned property at Randall and Thorn Tree Road. Always active in the community in the 1960's, Mr. Cantrell was on the District 303 school board. He also was previously the project manager for the design and construction of the original McCormack Place in Chicago which opened in 1960. And in 1943 Mr. Cantrell had moved to Chicago to work at the University of Chicago as part of The Manhattan Project. For more information about his involvement with The Manhattan Project go to <https://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories/robert-cantrells-interview>.

Without a doubt, an updated Architectural Survey would list the building at 1 East Main Street in St. Charles as a "significant" building of Mid-Century Modern style which has maintained a high degree of integrity involving a notable level of historic importance. Its exterior design appearance and original materials are important to maintain for future generations to understand and enjoy this product of its time.

Michael A. Dixon, FAIA

Historic Preservation Architect

Subject: Re: 1 East Main Street

Email from Hennie Reynolds, PhD to Gloria Klimek

I could open the site and did look at the proposal. I also looked at the architects who this developer is employing but I do not know anyone in their office. I went back to a few photographs I have of the building and looked at the proposal in detail. My feeling is;

1) That the architects (maybe under pressure from the developer) are not treating the adaptive re-use of this modernist building with real deep insight or respect. This is an important mid-century modernist commercial building in such an important and prominent location. It has the opportunity to have a second life of great value to the community and to the historic fabric of St Charles.

2) The architects are proposing cutting fenestration into the facades that are highly insensitive and uncreative; and to boot, are adding surface treatments and secondary elements of wood that are completely out of character. These changes will alter and ultimately permanently destroy the integrity of the modernist building. This loss will be permanent and an important site in St Charles (who have the opportunity to show-case a progressive adaptive re-use of a site) will in future not reflect well on the preservation commission's work.

3) The building lends itself most perfectly as an art gallery / artist residency and some live-work creative loft-like spaces. Maybe the ground floor gallery idea can still include a substantial restaurant. In such a model one can imagine a mix of commercial and private tenants and also possibly a satellite venue for the St Charles Arts Council. The most important architectural question is how one introduce more light into the second floor and how to treat the detail design of new elements.

You are welcome to share these thoughts with whoever you wish and if it can help - I can also write a formal letter as part of an objection....

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Hi Rachel,

As a former member of the Preservation Partners board, I am always interested in preserving historic buildings. And this building is certainly architecturally significant, as is Bob Cantrell the designer of the building. He was quite prominent in town it appears, after talking to some of the old time locals who knew and remember him. The building is certainly a unique modernist design that deserves to be preserved as close as possible to the original plans. I hope that the plans include an architect is familiar with adaptive reuse of historic buildings. And like my husband commented, Can you even remove all of the brick walls that they want to take out and have it still be stable? I like the idea of it being a restaurant, boutique hotel and the fact that it would not be torn down, And it certainly is a landmark to the locals as is the wonderful city hall of ours.

I do hope the council gives it very careful consideration before approving the current plans.

Julie Lon, St Charles

Rachel Hitzemann, City Planner,

Please include my comments pertaining to discussion of the former Harris Bank Building at 1 East Main Street:

To the Members of the Historic Preservation Commission,

This noble bank building at 1 East Main Street was designed by well-known architect Robert Cantrell 56 years ago. It is the essence of simplicity. The design reflects the beautiful Fox River and gives view to the majestic Municipal Center facing it. Its walkways invite all to approach.

The present owner of the building is suggesting a complete redesign of the facade which would destroy its beauty and purpose. It would become a box, heavy with black framed windows, black railings and black and wooden panels. It would be cut off from the river and the public's views.

As a longtime resident of St. Charles, I watched this building's construction and have been proud to see it as a gateway to the city. I urge the Historic Preservation Commission to preserve its integrity and original design.

Sincerely,

Diane E. MacNeille

January 20, 2021

Historic Preservation Commission
City of St. Charles
2 E. Main Street
St. Charles, IL 60174



RE: 1 E. Main Street Façade Improvements

Dear Commissioners,

Preservation Partners has significant concerns regarding the proposed façade improvements at 1 E. Main Street, the former BMO Harris Bank Building (hereafter referred to as the Harris Bank building).

For decades, the Harris Bank building has stood prominently along the east bank of the Fox River, complementing the early modern masterpiece that is our Municipal Building. As one of only a few mid-century modern buildings remaining in downtown St. Charles, the Harris Bank building represents unique urban infill during a period of suburban sprawl. Its streamlined, vertical presence at the southeast end of the Main Street Bridge and terrace that extends out over the river **have been visual landmarks for visitors to and residents of St. Charles alike.**

The proposed façade changes to the Harris Bank building **severely detract from the original design of the building.** Though it appears that an attempt was made by the design team to mimic the alternating vertical bands of glass and brick that characterize the west elevation and portions of the south elevation, the resulting fragmentation complicates a historically simple façade design. Proposed louvered screens add further visual noise to the riverside elevation and the addition of a projecting one-story vestibule at the north, main elevation significantly alters the overall massing of the original design.

The apparent proposed mixed-use nature of the interior buildout seems consistent with the growing needs and interests of the community and is appreciated. However, its execution at the exterior of the building needs to be carefully reconsidered to preserve the unique mid-century design of this prominently-located St. Charles landmark.

As the pioneer modernist architect Mies van der Rohe is credited with saying, “God is in the details.” The proposed façade improvements obscure the simplistic modern details of the Harris Bank building at 1 E. Main Street and significantly alter the historic integrity of the structure.

Regards,



Kelsey Shipton
Executive Director
Preservation Partners of the Fox Valley
On behalf of the Board of Directors

I have some thoughts I would like to share as the commission considers a proposal for façade changes to the former BMO Harris bank building at 1 East Main Street. St. Charles has several significant downtown buildings that is unusual for a city of its size. Age and architectural styles range from the 19th century Osgood building through the 1960's mid-century modern building under consideration. They are all important buildings expressive of their times and the examples of architectural styles: the Spanish Colonial of the Arcada, the romantic revival of the hotel Baker, art modern of the municipal building and mid-century modern of 1 East Main display the forward thinking of a populace willing to take a chance as styles changed. Thus, St. Charles architecture changed, too and that is reflected in our Main St. facades.

Robert Cantrell, the architect of 1 East Main St., embraced the new architecture of his age and left St. Charles with a handsome and durable example of mid-century architecture. Its straightforward and unembellished façade enhances its site on the east side of the river and is a pleasure to view driving north through the downtown. Robert Cantrell lived in St. Charles from 1949 to 1970 and owned an architectural practice here. In the downtown he designed the Blue Goose store that formerly stood at the corner of Illinois and 1st streets and the mid-century modern bank building on Main Street. He laid the first steps for Randall Rd. literally by hand and wheelbarrow following the county's plan so he could access the land he bought to the north for his housing development, Timber Valley. He was the project manager for the design and construction of the original McCormick Place and earlier had worked at the metallurgical building at the University of Chicago that was part of the Manhattan Project. Leaving St. Charles in 1940, he moved to New York and later to California where he founded the "Recovering from Homelessness" program in Whittier, CA. He died in Sept. 2014 in Arizona.

Any substantial changes to its façade will destroy the integrity of this handsome building which is such an asset to Main Street and St. Charles.

Gloria Klimek