

January 19, 2021

Dear Honorable Members of the St. Paul City Council,

Thank you Mayor Carter, our City Council Members and other leaders for your foresight to prepare St. Paul's 2040 Comprehensive Plan to guide our citizens at this pivotal time in history. The Plan requires us to recognize who bore past **opportunity costs**. The decision you make today regarding the demolition of Loras Hall will define the meaning of our first Core Value, **Equity** and Opportunity. I ask you to approve the Appeal of the University of Saint Thomas to the Heritage Preservation Commission Decision of Loras Hall (2260 Summit Avenue) in the Summit West Heritage Preservation District.

The Heritage Preservation Commission's (HPC) majority decision on December 14, 2020 represents how equity worked in historic St. Paul. The vote keeps the **rights** to Loras Hall held, in perpetuity, by the caste that hired a young architect and put him in a position to build something he did not believe in. Cass Gilbert's later work adds **value** to the caste's **stake** in Loras Hall. One of the Commissioners described the personal pleasure he feels "walking through Loras Hall". He expressed his belief that future generations will find **worth** in the same experience. Commissioner Nelson expressed a different interpretation of equity and voted to demolish Loras Hall, also for the benefit of future generations. His decision feels relevant to St. Paul's future needs identified in the 2040 Plan.

Equity is a word with two meanings:

1. Equity

the quality of being fair and impartial.

Similar words: Fairness, Justice, Fair play

2. Equity

the value of the shares issued by a company.

Similar words: Value, Worth, Ownership, Rights Dictionary Google

The definition of "**Equity**" determines the distribution of **Opportunity costs**, "*an economics term that refers to the value of what you have to give up in order to choose something else.*" (shopify Business encyclopedia) Our citizen's "Pride" in our historic buildings" has been a theme in discussions about Loras Hall. My "Pride" is in the historic citizens who, in a society that endowed equity rights to wealth and privilege, lived with a vision of equity that helped lead St. Paul to the 2040 Plan.

The Heritage Preservation Meeting juxtaposed the historic generosity of St. Paul citizens I've witnessed in the past with the recent entitled grip I've seen on community resources. Redefining equity is a discombobulating experience. Good people fight the "taken" loss when it's not their choice to "give". We are all more alike than different. I humbly attest, as someone accustomed to feeling generous, it's painful to face, in my siblings words, "Spoiled Brat" moments. I think that's another commonality. I was not my best self at HPC.

My HPC experience inspired me to look back to people in my/our history who taught me to do better. Two people came immediately to mind, Emily Anne Staples Tuttle and Paul Verret. I had

the privilege of working with each of them when (1990 to 2004) I served as Associate Director of Hamm Memorial Psychiatric Clinic, an outpatient sliding-fee-scale non-profit founded by a family with the courage to put their name on a mental health clinic in 1954.

In a letter I wrote to Emily Anne in 2015 I described the model of behavior I aspire to practice, “I had the privilege to watch you change the dynamics of groups with a question, or a suggestion, or a supportive look. You demonstrated the power of simple kindness to convert adversaries into collaborators. You help people to be their best selves by treating each person like she, or he, matters to you.”

In May of 2019 the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota published an article titled, *Emily Anne Staples Tuttle: Reflections on an Extraordinary Life*. The article noted that at the time of Emily Anne’s passing on January 13, 2018, the list of her service “was long: first female DFL senator elected to the Minnesota State Senate (1977-1981); service on more than 50 boards; public advocate for women’s rights, health care policy, economic growth, and court reform; ardent supporter of the arts (music, theater, visual); and more. In a word: prolific.”

The article was an interview with Emily Anne’s daughters, Kate Staples and Missy Staples Thompson. I think the messages her daughters relayed are relevant to today.

When asked about her mother’s legacy Missy responded: “I think Mom’s legacy was persistence, because it does take a long time to change things. Her generosity to the community and her belief that the world can change if you put your time, treasure, talent, and energy toward nurturing the next generation.”

To the question, “What would she say to this generation?” Missy said: “I think she would be encouraging people to find consensus, to find common points where we can come together, and to recognize life and community is made of change. [In] her lifetime, she saw demographic changes and cultural changes in the Twin Cities community and throughout the world. [Mom would remind this generation] to realize the nature of life is change. You can either fight it or embrace it, so go ahead and embrace it!”

<https://www.wfmn.org/emily-anne-staples-tuttle-reflections-on-an-extraordinary-life/>

I was one of the many fortunate people who had Paul Verret as a mentor. After Paul’s death on June 29, 2020 former Mayor George Latimer was quoted in the Pioneer Press : “To put it simply, I know of no person not in elected office who was a more powerful and positive influence on our city in the time that I’ve been paying attention. I’m not overstating it. He was a huge supporting presence for everything we tried to do in our city.”

<https://www.twincities.com/2020/07/01/paul-verret-who-led-st-paul-foundation-for-nearly-30-years-dies-at-79/>

In retirement Paul Verret served on the Boards of both Minnesota Historical Society and Ramsey County Historical Society. He respected history but, in my experience with him, equity of fairness and justice was his first core value. “One of the St. Paul & Minnesota Foundation’s funds that was especially close to Verret’s heart was the Diversity Endowment Fund, which was created in 1991’, said his wife, Carolyn. ‘At a time when many organizations didn’t want to

talk about diversity, Paul always wanted to talk about it,' said David Byrd, president of the United Hospital Foundation, on whose board Verret served.”

The Star Tribune reported, “Verret personally mentored several people of color who went on to careers at local nonprofits. Among them was Miguel Ramos, who is now director of diversity and inclusion for the Minnesota Twins baseball team. When Ramos moved to Minnesota from Puerto Rico in the 1990s for a job at a Twin Cities nonprofit, Verret was among the first people who offered him a helping hand. ‘We need people like Paul, not only to give advice, but to open doors,’ Ramos said. ‘It’s good now that I can give back something like what Paul gave to me.’”

I feel a bit like Miguel Ramos as I share one more message from Paul Verret relevant to your Loras Hall deliberation. Beth Burns, President of the Friends of the Library said, “Paul Verret has been an important mentor and good friend to me — helping me understand our organization’s history but **not tethering me to it,**” she said.

<http://strib.mn/394BxTh>

I believe in the citizens of St. Paul. I believe in our leaders. I believe in the 2040 Plan will put us on the right side of both history and the future. I am about to listen to a webinar with Russ Stark titled “Saint Paul’s Climate Action and Resilience Plan”. As much as I feel people’s pain, I am comforted by Emily Annes’ wisdom “*realize the nature of life is change*”. St. Paul cannot be a hoarder house. We must choose wisely to keep the most meaningful treasures of our city. Loras Hall is not a treasure. Do the equation. There is no equitable way to assign the use and environmental opportunity costs of keeping Loras Hall to future students or citizens. Listen to Emily Anne, “*the world can change if you put your time, treasure, talent, and energy toward nurturing the next generation.*”

I implore you to approve the Appeal of the University of Saint Thomas to the Heritage Preservation Commission Decision of Loras Hall (2260 Summit Avenue) in the Summit West Heritage Preservation District. “You can either fight it or embrace it, so go ahead and embrace it!”

Respectfully,

Cathy Plessner
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