



January 15, 2021

Councilmember Rebecca Noecker  
310-B City Hall  
15 Kellogg Blvd. West  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Councilmember Noecker:

Thank for your service to the City of Saint Paul during a stressful time for elected officials and our community. I am grateful for your dedication to our city.

I write to ask you to **vote in favor of the University of St. Thomas' appeal** of the Heritage Preservation Commission's (HPC) denial of a demolition permit for Loras Hall. As you have read in our materials, we seek this permit because we are planning to build a state-of-the-art STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) building adjacent to our existing science and engineering buildings. We believe that we have met the standards required for a demolition permit of the existing building, and we are seeking your review of the HPC's denial. We are confident that once you review the record, you will agree to overturn the HPC decision and achieve the right balance among serving the educational needs of our current and future students, encouraging positive growth and development in the City of Saint Paul, and preserving buildings.

Allow me to outline some important aspects of this appeal. Your support for this appeal will:

### **1. Help St. Thomas Meet Critical Workforce Needs**

The STEAM complex will allow us to grow enrollment and increase both ethnic and gender diversity in the engineering, science, health and digital media fields, in close collaboration with arts programs. The exemplary offerings, along with the physical complex built adjacent to our current facilities, will attract to the City of Saint Paul top students and faculty from around the country and globe, who seek premier STEAM experiences and degrees.

### **2. Improve Our Students' Education**

The ability to build in this location is critical to maximizing the educational benefit of the complex. This location creates connectivity to our existing science and engineering spaces (O'Shaughnessy and Owens halls) and allows both students and faculty to better collaborate and make maximum use of classrooms, labs and learning spaces. Being forced to build STEAM facilities around the perimeter of Loras Hall or on a more distant part of campus would hamper our ability to offer the best possible spaces for learning and

research. Today's best practices require STEAM spaces to be interrelated, adjacent to one another and allow for free-flowing conversations and informal collaborations. Placement of the new STEAM building on the Loras Hall site will maximize student and faculty interactions and thus improve student learning.

### **3. Meet Shared Goals of St. Thomas and the City**

This building provides a tremendous opportunity for St. Thomas while meeting many shared goals of the City of Saint Paul. The new space will allow our engineering, science and arts programs to collaborate with public and private K-12 programs and will offer performance and gathering spaces that neighbors, community leaders and nonprofits can enjoy. Additional green space will benefit neighbors and those who travel through campus for recreation and will be consistent with our growing sustainability goals, which include pollinator paths on south and north campus.

### **4. Recognize Support from Neighbors**

I am proud to share with you that we presented this project to various neighbor groups in its early stages and provided many opportunities for dialogue. The overall response from neighbors was very positive, as you can see in the packet of materials. Both the Macalester Groveland Community Council and Union Park District Council voted overwhelmingly to support the demolition of Loras Hall. Although you will hear from a few isolated neighbors in opposition, please know that many more are in support, and we are grateful that they share our excitement for this project.

### **5. Ensure that Our Investment Benefits Students**

As we invest in building this complex, we have a responsibility to ensure that each dollar spent is maximized to directly benefit students. If we were forced to build around the perimeter of Loras or incorporate that building into this project, it would be neither efficient nor economical. Due to poor ventilation and energy inefficiency, among other factors, Loras is approaching the end of its useful life in its current condition. Preliminary estimates indicate that it would cost nearly \$10 million to rehabilitate and repurpose Loras Hall. Even with that investment, the building's structural lack of flexibility would limit its usefulness. As fiscal stewards of the university, we cannot justify spending student tuition dollars on Loras Hall.

### **6. Help Us Use Land Efficiently**

Because we are a land-locked campus in this vibrant city, we need to plan our space judiciously. Our current expansion ability is limited by the Conditional Use Permit of 2004. Building on this location maximizes the efficient use of our land while protecting options for future generations to adjust to changing educational needs. With your approval of this demolition permit, our STEAM building will be efficiently placed on campus where it best serves our students.

## 7. Honor the Standards Set Forth in the City Code

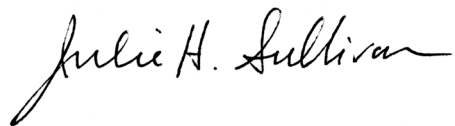
The City Code clearly outlines the standards that must be considered when evaluating a request for the demolition of a building located within an historic district: (a) whether the building has significant architectural and historic merit; (b) the effect of the demolition on surrounding buildings; and (c) the economic value or usefulness of the existing building compared with the value or usefulness of any proposed replacement structures. As outlined in the letter from our land use counsel, the record clearly supports a finding that demolition of Loras Hall is justified under the Code. Loras Hall does not have significant architectural or historic merit, and its demolition will not have a significant impact on surrounding buildings. Perhaps most important, we urge you to find that the economic value and usefulness of Loras Hall is significantly outweighed by the economic value and usefulness of the building that will be designed to replace it.

In closing, please know that St. Thomas **has** invested \$24 million over the past few years in preserving and updating several historic buildings on our campus, including our chapel, and we will continue to invest in our historic buildings. We are proud of our traditional architecture and historic campus, and we are committed to intentionally balancing both the preservation of historic structures and serving students' educational needs.

The University of St. Thomas is very proud to be a resident institution of this great city. We employ 1,400 people on the St. Paul campus and welcome some 1,600 new undergraduate and hundreds of graduate students to St. Paul every year. Many alumni — currently totaling about 13,000 — stay and make St. Paul their home. We are a great importer of talent to the city and a vibrant employer and neighbor. We are proud to anchor beautiful, historic Summit Avenue and appreciate its tradition and beauty. We look forward to continuing to be your strong partner for years to come.

Thank you, Councilmember Noecker, for your thoughtful consideration of this appeal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie H. Sullivan". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Julie H. Sullivan  
President