



March 24, 2026



**RE: Support Historic Rondo Renters**

Dear HRA Interim Director Melanie McMahon, Chair Cheniqua Johnson, and Commissioners,

**ModelCities**

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Saint Paul, MN 55104  
(651) 632-8350  
[www.modelcities.org](http://www.modelcities.org)

Model Cities is a St. Paul–based non-profit organization with deep roots in the historic Rondo community. For nearly six decades, we have worked alongside residents to strengthen housing stability, expand economic opportunity, and support community-led development—particularly for Black families and others most impacted by displacement and inequitable policy decisions. Addressing the lasting impacts of the destruction of Rondo is central to our mission and our work today.

We are writing to support updates to the Inheritance Fund guidelines that would ensure descendants of historic Rondo residents—including those whose families were renters—are eligible for additional down payment assistance.

While the current framework recognizes descendants of property owners, the lived reality of Rondo was much broader. The neighborhood was home to both homeowners and renters who lived in multi-generational households, duplexes, and apartments and who were deeply connected to the community’s social, cultural, spiritual, and economic life. When I-94 and related urban renewal decisions dismantled Rondo, renters were displaced alongside homeowners and experienced significant loss of stability, community, and opportunity.

Although renters did not hold title to property, they lost access to neighborhood-based wealth-building opportunities, including proximity to Black-owned businesses, shared economic networks, and pathways to future homeownership. These losses have had lasting, generational effects that align directly with the purpose of the Inheritance Fund.

Including descendants of renters would strengthen the program’s ability to address generational wealth loss tied to displacement. It would better reflect the full history of who was impacted and help ensure that families with deep and meaningful ties to Rondo are not unintentionally excluded.

We respectfully encourage the HRA Commission to adopt program guidelines that recognize descendants of residents—not only property owners—so the Inheritance Fund can more fully respond to the historic harm experienced by the Rondo community.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued leadership.

Sincerely,

Kizzy L. Downie, CEO  
Model Cities of St. Paul, Inc.