



Contact: Amanda Crawley
acrawley@historickansascity.org
816-931-8448

Donaldson House Demolition Position Statement

December 10, 2012, Kansas City: The Historic Kansas City Foundation sadly acknowledges the intended demolition of Donaldson House (4347 Oak St.) by the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI) on December 17th, 2012. Our information concerning this demolition is reliably reported from within KCAI. All known channels of public review to avoid this outcome have been exhausted. In May 2012, when the waiting period mandated by the Historic Preservation Commission expired, the KCAI was legally able to demolish the house. Although there is no remaining legal obstacle preventing demolition, our community should expect better outcomes and practices from KCAI concerning their land use and facility needs. Demolition also (and always) flies in the face of responsible sustainability practices, something else we should be able to expect from an institution sensitive to the public interest.

Over the past year, the Historic Kansas City Foundation has been involved in a number of advocacy efforts to save Donaldson House. We met with KCAI leadership about alternatives to demolition. We identified the Donaldson House on our 2011 Most Endangered List, which led to press coverage concerning an option to purchase the house for \$1.00 and move it from the site. We facilitated building walkthroughs with several possible buyers/movers. We explored with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) the possibility of a Section 106 review.

We had hoped that the better instincts of good stewardship might prevail to save this historically and architecturally significant structure, particularly when the steward is an organization devoted to the visual and design arts. We appreciate the efforts of KCAI to document the Donaldson House and salvage historically significant materials, but remain concerned about other historic resources in their purview. There is an apparent lack of flexibility and public consideration in problem solving that have permeated this matter.

Years of advocacy efforts were successful in delaying the demolition. But, ultimately, KCAI was unwilling to incorporate the reuse of the house in a redevelopment plan for the site, and there was no investor willing to move the structure in order to save it. Certainly, more effort could have been made. Institutions often make decisions based on some alleged financial metric, while other considerations - cultural, social and environmental, are neglected or ignored. This is a loss for the Southmoreland neighborhood and our entire community.

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