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May 10, 2013

Dear Mayor Bell and Council Members:

I am writing to share Preservation Durham's opinion on the upcoming Council vote to remove landmark status from Liberty Warehouse, located at 611-613 Rigsbee Avenue. **Preservation Durham opposes any change in landmark status, for the reasons that follow.**

**Removing landmark status for the building is the only issue on the table at this time. Coupling this decision with information on any development that may or may not happen at a future date adds complexity to what should be an objective decision.**

To be considered a Durham historic landmark, a building, must possess distinction within the context or period of significance, and must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. Individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places or on the Study List.
2. Statewide Significance status granted by the State Historic Preservation Office.
3. Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship, feeling and association on the whole, and:
  - a. Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local, regional, or national history; or
  - b. Association with the lives of persons significant in local, regional, national history; or
  - c. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; possess high artistic values (i.e., the architecture alone is significant in its own right); or
  - d. Yield, or be likely to yield, information important to Durham's history or prehistory.

Liberty Warehouse Nos. 1 and 2 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008 with a period of significance of 1938-1958. Criteria for listing were items 3a and 3c, as given above. The building continues to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places; collapse of a portion of the roof in 2011 has not changed this listing, nor has it compromised the building's ability to meet any of the criteria for which it was originally listed. These are the facts:

- A. Liberty Warehouse met the City of Durham's criteria for Local Landmark status in 2010;
- B. The City of Durham's criteria for Local Landmark status have not changed since 2010;
- C. The characteristics of the building that met the criteria for Local Landmark status have not changed;
- D. Therefore Liberty Warehouse is still a Local Landmark.

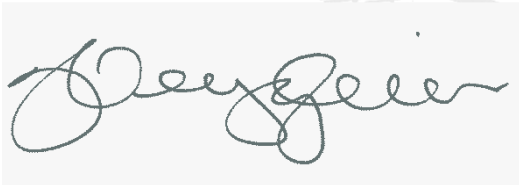
**To overturn this factual deduction would be a purely subjective decision and one that has various ramifications:**

- A. The City Council expects the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to operate according to objective criteria and established standards in designating historic landmarks and reviewing Certificates of Appropriateness. **Removing landmark status for a property that meets all of the established criteria undermines the HPC's ability to objectively administer its programs.**
  
- B. **Many developers use landmark status and the associated reduction in property taxes in their development proformas and many of the key redevelopment projects downtown have used this provision.** Will developer confidence waver if the City Council has the right to dismiss landmark status, and associated property tax cuts, at whim? What effects will this uncertainty have on other upcoming projects for local landmarks, such as the 21C redevelopment of the Hill (Sun Trust) Building?

**We understand that the Liberty Warehouse will be a difficult building to rehabilitate, but allowing for demolition and new construction without any design review is not the right path to take.** The building should remain a landmark, not to prevent redevelopment, but to make sure that any redevelopment intelligently assesses the historic importance of the site, engages the HPC in what portions of the building to save, and ensures that any new construction is appropriate within the industrial context of the neighborhood.

The Geer Street area has seen significant reinvestment over the past five years with Fullsteam, Motorco, Geer Street Garden, Cocoa Cinnamon and the upcoming addition of The Pit. It is in the City and local landowners' best interest to ensure that new development in this area is consistent with the aesthetic that is driving its commercial success. Local Landmark status for Liberty Warehouse will help ensure that this happens.

Sincerely,



Wendy Hillis, AIA  
Executive Director