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Dear Members:

Last May, Preservation Durham entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the future owners of the Liberty Warehouse site, East West Partners. Our concern with the Liberty site has always been two-fold: 1) the importance of the historic warehouse - the last remaining tobacco auction warehouse in Durham, a structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places and worthy of City Landmark Status, and 2) the effect that any redevelopment of the site would have on the character of the surrounding historic neighborhood.

We believe that Liberty Warehouse still meets the criteria of City Landmark status. We believe that the Council's vote to remove this status set a poor precedent for the city's historic preservation programs. However, after judging the political landscape prior to the unanimous City Council vote, and with the understanding that landmark status removal was all but final, we thought that direct negotiation with the owner and developer was the only viable course to the most important objective: retention of as many of Liberty Warehouse's defining features as possible.

Nine months later, it is clear that we misjudged. We had hoped that the MOU would be the start of a process and dialogue that would allow us to positively affect the design for the new building. Because East West Partners does not specialize in historic preservation, we thought we could offer technical expertise on the salvage process, along with feedback on the meaningful incorporation of features of the historic structure into their design. Unfortunately, we were excluded from the design process, and the current design does not take into account the historic structure or neighborhood context. It is a disappointment to Preservation Durham and our constituents.

Over the past several weeks, we have heard passionate criticism about our effectiveness from many Durham residents, including those on our own advocacy committee. We take this criticism to heart, and sincerely regret that efforts made in good faith have not met a willing partner. This has been a learning experience for all of us. But we haven't given up on Liberty. Going forward, we'll continue to try to work with East West Partners. We expect them to come back with a better design that adheres to the MOU, respects the history of the building and neighborhood, and preserves the Rigsbee frontage.

Here's what we **all** can do differently in the future: Attend council meetings and speak up. Advocate for local historic districts. Let the elected people know they have made a colossal mistake and that you're not happy about it. Get involved with preservation groups and volunteer your time. Make your voice heard. Help us make a difference in Durham's future.

Wendy Hillis, AIA
Executive Director