



Louisiana Landmarks Society & Pitot House

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March 14, 2017

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Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser

P.O. Box 44243

Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Re: Carrollton Courthouse

Dear Lt. Governor Nungesser:

Louisiana Landmarks Society is still trying to encourage the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) to delay the public auction of the Carrollton Courthouse scheduled for March 23, 2017. In the short 6 months since the concept of the “French House” was born, it has gained tremendous support. We believe, given more time, we could come to terms with a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement (CEA) and have an opportunity to raise funds.

In speaking with a school board member yesterday, I was told the best way to postpone this sale is to provide documentation that the plan is moving forward. I was also informed that you, as a state entity, have the power to broker a CEA and even avoid the property price by offering like value. This might be the best opportunity to keep the property from being sold to the highest bidder.

There are several problems with the current plan by the OPSB. The worst case scenario for historic preservation and assuring that the property stays as a benefit to the community is to auction it to the highest bidder. The use is extremely important not only to the neighborhoods, but the entire state – although irrelevant to the OPSB. The property has always served the community, and should continue. This is too important a building to become a hotel or private condos, profiting just a few. Instead of a highest bidder situation, the “best use” should be part of the consideration. OPSB could issue a Request for Proposals to see what the developers plan to do with the property – and then make a more informed decision on the new owner while still getting the appraised value or like compensation.

The second issue is OPSB’s public commitment to work with Louisiana Landmarks Society in placing a covenant on the sale of the building to ensure the historic elements and exterior are protected. Although this site just recently went under New Orleans’ Historic District Landmark Commission review, the HDLC simply does not offer the protections a site of such architectural and historical significance requires.

Decisions by the HDLC have been overturned and can be subject to developers or political whims, whereas an easement provides a perpetual protection attached to the site. Representatives of OPSB publicly committed to work with Louisiana Landmarks Society to develop these preservation covenants, however, we hear now that the school board is reluctant to put restrictions on the sale that might hinder a buyer's ability to use the site as they wish. One of the basic requirements we would like to see is that the site be Landmarked. With only a week until the auction, potential buyers are unaware that restrictions could apply.

Whatever happens to the site, in your position over the State Historic Preservation Office, it would be in line for you to help preserve the notable features, the stately presence, the accessibility and the history of the site. Ensuring protections of the architecturally significant features and helping to find the best use for the site that would be beneficial to the entire state – not just the guy with the most money.

Although it seems inconceivable, in the 1950s the Carrollton Courthouse was slated for demolition in order to build an A&P grocery in a strip mall. Louisiana Landmarks Society stepped in at that time to help save the building. In 2015 we nominated it to the National Trust's 11 Most Endangered Sites in America, and to Louisiana Landmarks Society's 9 Most Endangered List. We feel compelled to continue to protect this site – particularly at this juncture when it may fall into private hands and be irreparably harmed.

Please let me know if there is anything we can do to help. I would be happy to speak with you at any time on this very important matter. You can reach me at 225-445-3800.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sandra Stokes
President, Louisiana Landmarks Society