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To the Evanston Preservation Commission

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Southeast Evanston Association (SEA) is writing to oppose Northwestern University's proposal to subdivide its East Campus.

For over 50 years, SEA has served as a watchdog and advocate for the residents of Southeast Evanston, playing an integral role in our community by creating coalitions, engaging elected officials, working for both constructive change and prudent preservation, and speaking out on behalf of our members and the citizens of our city.

Northwestern's proposal appears to focus almost entirely on shrinking the area where the Preservation Commission and City Council have the right and responsibility to review and approve proposed changes, additions, and removals on the East Campus. In its proposal, Northwestern has created a gerrymandered map that basically only leaves landmarked buildings under the purview of the Commission and Council, and removes practically everything else from the City's and the Commission's scrutiny. This apparently includes the streetscape along Sheridan Road as well as multiple other aspects of the campus visible from and affecting surrounding areas.

Many of our members live in the Lakeshore Historic Preservation District. Few of their houses are landmarked. Nonetheless, District residents are required to seek permission from the city if they want to redo windows, replace fences, or make other visible structural changes. Why? Because, changes to non-landmarked properties affect the character and quality of the District.

This is clearly true for campus properties as well. Campus buildings do not have to be landmarked to have a significant effect on the historic character of the area. Changes to non-landmarked structures and new construction on campus affect City streetscapes and the character of the neighborhoods surrounding the University.

Although Northwestern's construction and architecture is often well done and even noteworthy, the University also has a history of insensitivity to the impact it has on its neighbors and its surroundings. The new parking garage / visitor's center is a striking example of this. Similarly, while the University has been very sensitive to its vistas looking outward from the campus, it has been far less sensitive about how the campus looks to its neighbors.

Most of the City's Standards for Review of Applications for Subdivisions reference protecting and preserving "the landmark, or area, property, structure site, or object". Northwestern's responses to these standards refer exclusively to landmarked buildings with no consideration of the areas, properties, structure sites, or objects that form the context of the landmarks.

If Northwestern's intentions are as benign as they would have us believe, we wonder why they need the relief they are proposing. Members of the Commission have already stated that, from the Commission's perspective, the work to review and approve Northwestern's projects is not burdensome.

There may be a subdivision of the campus that does not do damage to the historic character of the area. However, an exclusive focus on landmarked buildings, disregarding the adjacent but un-landmarked structures and areas that provide the context for these landmarks, totally misses the point.

We urge the Commission to reject Northwestern's proposal.

Sincerely

SOUTHEAST EVANSTON ASSOCIATION

Sheila Sullivan
President