



Salt Lake City School Board
February 17, 2023

Members of the Board,

I am writing to express Preservation Utah's enthusiastic support to preserve and modernize West High School. On behalf of our members, and alongside alumni, students, other community partners, and citizens of Salt Lake City, we ask that every possible effort is made to save this important building.

First and foremost, we would like to recognize that the iconic West High School building stands as the last proud representative of Salt Lake City's 130 years of High School Education, and as a testament to the early citizens' sacrifice and efforts to setup and build a strong secular upper education system – the first such institution in the State of Utah, and a precursor to our recognized statewide tradition in learning, community involvement and service.

We also recognize that this building embodies a century of excellence in education, school spirit, and community pride. It is a prime example of 20th century craftsmanship and iconic school architecture that has helped build and tie together Salt Lake City's west side, downtown, Avenues, Granary, and Marmalade districts for over 100 years. We believe its rich history helps preserve and foster an understanding of that heritage and sense of community today and in the future.

Finally, based on prior examples of successful projects, we recognize that this building, built with tremendous care, could continue to effectively accommodate higher learning into the future. We ask that the School Board carefully review the examples of Ogden High School and Ogden's Polk Elementary as recent examples of what true partnership between the school board, educators, architects, contractors and the community can achieve.

We invite the Salt Lake City School Board to partner with Preservation Utah and the expertise of the broader preservation community in exploring further options for West High School before any decisions are made. Together, we can help determine how preservation can enhance the future of the school while still delivering a viable, cost effective and student/teacher centered outcome.

We ask the Salt Lake City School Board to consider the attached points as they plan the future of West High School.

Respectfully Yours,

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West High School History

The now-threatened West High School building is the product of more than a century of public ambition, effort, and investment. As we consider this building's future, we should also remember its past. Specifically, we should fully understand what it took to build and then sustain this remarkable building for 101 years. We must also ask if we, as a society, and you as a school board, should be remembered for throwing away all the heritage West High School represents by demolishing it?

West High School, called Salt Lake High School from its founding in 1890 until the establishment of East High School in 1912, is Utah's oldest public high school. West High's establishment ultimately stemmed out of Utah's late 19th-century struggles to establish effective systems of governance, create lasting institutions, and achieve statehood. Before 1887, most of Utah's schools were managed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This changed with the 1887 Federal Edmunds-Tucker Act which, among many other things, gave Utah's Territorial Supreme Court power to appoint a "commissioner of schools" to oversee curriculum and integrate Mormon students and teachers with their non-Mormon counterparts. The subsequent 1890 Free School Law further ordered that free education be provided to all of Utah's students. The separation of Utah's school system from Mormon control, and the establishment of free public schools were critical to Utah's statehood efforts.

The first several incarnations of West High included among other locations, the basement of the 1885 Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church which stood on 4th East & 2nd South, a building on Pierpont Street, and the University of Deseret (now University of Utah) buildings which stood purposeless after the university moved to Fort Douglas in 1900.

By the 1910s, the efforts to build purpose-built high schools with tax funds begun to take hold. East High School was constructed in 1913 with great community support, and much smaller communities were constructing their own high schools. Core elements of the Granite High School campus were built between 1910-1921, Jordan High School likewise appeared in 1914, and Cypress High School in 1918. Each of these schools helped to open the door to constructing a premier new West High School. A \$2,100,000 bond passed by Salt Lake City residents in early 1919 eventually funded West High School, and the school was completed 2 year later.

We celebrate this history and place it on par with other historic buildings across the city and valley that were once threatened but instead continue to tell the story of Utah's ascension to statehood, early growth, and determination. We would ask the School Board to reflect on the once threatened Salt Lake City & County Building on Washington Square, saved from the wrecking ball in the 1980s.

Architecture & Preservation Values

Various architects competed for the privilege of designing the new West High, with the contract ultimately awarded to Lewis Cannon and John Fetzer, the principles of the well-known Salt Lake City-based firm Cannon & Fetzer.

In 1921, local newspapers highlighted the results of nearly two years of planning. West High's design was described by these papers as reflecting the then-popular "school Gothic" style, a style intended to recall elite educational campuses on the East Coast of the United States and in the United Kingdom.

When the school's construction ended in the fall of 1922, many commemorated the vision reflected in the new West High School. School and district leaders were heralded for their vision, others gave credit to the skill of architects and builders, and politicians were credited with making West High School a reality.

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The main block of the original West High School campus still stands, with significant architectural integrity, and with a commanding presence for the surrounding city blocks. In the School Board commissioned presentations on options for West High, the pages are dotted with architectural iconography as the key representation of the school itself.

Despite upgrades and changes made over the past 100 years, the building retains the vast majority of the qualities originally envisioned by the Cannon & Fetzner, and constructed by local craftsmen. We recognize that windows and entry doors have been replaced, and would again be replaced in the next round of upgrades. However, the remaining façade, terracotta ornamentation, vestibuled entries, school clock, formal landscaping and site placement are largely original, and strongly contribute to the school's continued architectural value in the city.

To only preserve a portion of the front façade, roughly 60 ft. wide, would effectively destroy the architectural values and integrity that the building represents. We would be left with a superficial pastiche of the school, and a constant reminder of what the School District decided to send to the landfill.

Community Value

Former National Trust president Richard Moe has stated that, *"Like individuals, a community can fall victim to amnesia, can lose the memory of what it was, and thereby lose touch with what it is and what it was meant to be. The loss of community memory happens most frequently and most dramatically in the destruction of familiar landmarks that are themselves familiar reminders of who we were, what we believed, and where we were headed."* (Richard Moe, *Changing Places*).

Iconic or landmark buildings are community assets, and those assets are effective anchors for community identity, community pride, a sense of belonging. Landmark buildings are often times the singular object that citizens reference when they speak of their community, e.g. the Granary District, The Ballpark Neighborhood, or the Fairground Neighborhood. Local businesses and neighborhoods can be shown to thrive as historic buildings anchor new developments, and are allowed to lend character, history and a sense of place to new developments and infills. We have wonderful examples of this across Salt Lake City, including Caputo's Market and the Pierpont Street developments anchored in and nearby by the historic automotive shops, or the thriving community around the 9th & 9th streets.

In her report on the survey of Americans about historic preservation, Sandra Shannon has stated that, *"community satisfaction has been found to be significantly associated with a person's overall quality of life. Its effect on quality of life is second only to marital satisfaction. It might be easy to brush off preference as something that is a low priority to people in the grand scheme of things, but it appears to actually matter to people in a deep way, and from a planning standpoint, this humanistic element should be an important consideration. If community is shared experience ... expressed in terms of a common physical place, old places are crucial. Old places are where people, time and place intertwine to form community."*

West High was built before the I-15 corridor reinforced the east/west divide in Salt Lake City. It was built before large swaths of the city's west side was redeveloped with convention centers, malls, parking lots and infrastructure expansions. Once home to a diverse community at the intersections of Greek Town, Japan Town and the Marmalade – it has continued to serve both the west, east and north sections of our city – one of very few buildings to truly promote integration and foster a single community experience.

References:

Moe, Richard and Carter Wilkie. *Changing Places Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl*. New York: Henry Holt and Company 1997, 261 (citations omitted).

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Shannon, Sandra. "[A Survey of the Public: Preference for Old and New Buildings](#), Attitudes about Historic Preservation, and Preservation-Related Engagement." Master's Thesis, University of Southern California. December, 2014.

Sustainability

Preservation and reuse of historic buildings reduces resource and material consumption, puts less waste in landfills, and consumes less energy than demolishing buildings and constructing new ones. Over the past decade, advances in high performance or "green" buildings have been numerous, but primarily have focused on new construction. Historic buildings, often energy efficient from inherent characteristics, can be upgraded with new technologies to maximize energy performance. Historic features such as windows can be repaired and restored for higher efficiency.

Historic buildings have embodied energy in them that is lost if a building is demolished. Embodied energy is a measurement of energy used in the process of building, from the extraction of raw materials - such as harvesting trees - to the final installation of the finished material - such as framing lumber and carpentry. Embodied carbon represents the carbon emissions from the actual construction process. According to a study commissioned by the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), about 80 billion BTUs of energy are embodied in a typical 50,000 square-foot commercial building, the equivalent of about 640,000 gallons of gasoline (ACHP, 1979).

A report produced by the Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of the potential environmental benefit of building reuse. A few of their findings include:

- **Reuse Matters.** Building reuse typically offers greater environmental savings than demolition and new construction. It can take between 10 to 80 years for a new energy efficient building to overcome, through efficient operations, the climate change impacts created by its construction. The study finds that the majority of building types in different climates will take between 20-30 years to compensate for the initial carbon impacts from construction.
- **Scale Matters.** Collectively, building reuse and retrofits substantially reduce climate change impacts. Retrofitting, rather than demolishing and replacing, would significantly help to meet total CO2 reduction targets over the next decade.
- **Design Matters.** The environmental benefits of reuse are maximized by minimizing the input of new construction materials. Renovation projects that require many new materials can reduce or even negate the benefits of reuse.
- **The Bottom Line:** Reusing existing buildings is good for the economy. Historic rehabilitation has a track record of creating 2 million jobs and generating \$90 billion in private investments.

References:

The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse - the Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
Sustainability and Historic Preservation - Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (2011)

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Student & Alumni Value – Current, Past & Future

From the many West High Alumni that have reached out to Preservation Utah, we recognize the inherent value that the iconic school building represents for the current and past students. Alumni continue to donate, volunteer their time, and share their life experiences with current students – largely because of the education they received there, the memories created within its walls, and through the reminder that the school building provides each and every day.

We also want to recognize the sacrifices and hard work that students committed to the establishment, funding and construction of West High School. This statement, published in the Salt Lake Telegram on Dec. 16, 1922 asserted that:

"In the new West Side High School, Salt Lake has an institution devoted to the cause of education which is not to be excelled anywhere in the country. It is one in which every resident of Salt Lake can take pride, constituting as it does a standing credit to the community. In the rush of progress, we are sometimes inclined to forget those responsible for progressive movements (...) Many of the leaders of the movement were seniors serving their last year in high school. For them there could be no selfish interest. They could not possibly receive any personal reward for their activity (...) The new West High School which is a source of pride to every citizen of Salt Lake means more to the young men and women who attended the institution a few years ago. It is a monument to their loyalty and perseverance as well as a tribute to their ideals of progress. The fact that no scroll bears their names cannot alter the credit which is due their initial efforts."

West High School has produced a long list of notable alumni, including civic leaders, artists, and Olympic level athletes. Rather than severing the ties to these men and women, and the over 100 000 students to attend West High, we ask the Salt Lake City School Board to embrace and celebrate the student body for its achievements, and invite future support to fund both preservation, and education of the next generation of alums.

Costs

We recognize that the school is nearing or past its prime as an educational facility, and needs to be updated. However, we believe that it is not primarily the historic main block that drives this need, but rather a need to upgrade or add advanced teaching facilities for STEM, Arts and Music. We believe these facilities can be added on the campus, without having to demolish the key elements of the historic structure. For more on this, please refer to the section below (An Alternative Plan That Celebrates the Past – Option 5). Below is a summary of the Ogden High School preservation, as well as current ongoing High School projects – as consideration for the Salt Lake City School Board and tax payers:

The Ogden High School expansion accomplished all of the above goals, through a combination of new construction, interior reconfiguration, structural upgrades, and targeted preservation. The project was completed in 3 phases:

- Phase 1 - New Construction Field House, Athletic Courts & Stadium
- Phase 2 – Reconstruction and selective additions of Cafeteria, Auditorium, Gym & Athletic wing. These were largely gutted wall to wall within the existing structure and footprint, and rebuilt with a modern layout and division of both floor plan and overall vertical use of the existing structure.
- Phase 3 – Preservation and Rebuild of the historic core. This included preservation of the exterior, interior corridors, and the restructuring of classrooms beyond that. While the corridors retained their historic character, the floorplan beyond was reconfigured into larger spaces to accommodate 21st century learning.

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The total investment for that project, across 3 phases to minimize student impact, came in at under \$70 million. The community added roughly \$10 million in private donations to painstakingly preserve some of the invaluable Art Deco ornamentation.

West High School does not contain the same level of intact interior or exterior artwork, and we are not advocating for a full interior restoration process, hence limiting the incremental costs associated with keeping the existing building.

West High School has roughly twice the student population of Ogden High School, which should be factored into the total costs, as should overall inflation of construction costs over the past 12 years. Even with this, we believe that the projected costs outlined in the current feasibility study (\$412M) is overestimating the incremental cost of preservation.

There are several new High Schools being planned or currently being constructed throughout the Salt Lake and Utah valleys. For comparison, we understand that the following costs represent current estimates:

~\$304-415M	West High School -- TBD – 2800 Students
~\$175M	Cyprus High School - New Construction – 2600 Students
~\$175M	Skyline High School – New Construction – 2000 Students
~\$145M	Wasatch High School – New Construction – 2350 Students
~\$134M	Tooele High School - New Construction – 1800 Students
~\$100M	Springville High School – New Construction – 1500 students
~\$100M	Spanish Fork High School – New Construction – 1500 students

We recognize that a reconstruction of the historic West High main structure would trigger additional seismic work to fully meet the standards of today and the future, but also want to remind the School Board, and Salt Lake City taxpayers that West High already had a major seismic retrofit in the late 1990s.

An Alternative Plan That Celebrates the Past – Option 5

Preservation Utah urges the School District to explore a path of preservation, that can retain more of the original building, while accommodating modern education facilities, sustainability, and an efficient footprint on the existing block. The following represents key tenants of our proposal for further investigation:

- 1) Optimize the use of the original West High Footprint by starting on the west side of the block. The original school plan was laid out as a quadrangle, with the main block facing east, and the technical school facing west, with utility buildings along the perimeter and the football field in the middle. The technical school and complementary buildings have long been changed, demolished or significantly altered. We propose demolishing the non-historic auxiliary buildings along the west and north side of the block first, including the football stadium, and focusing on building a 21st century campus and specialty spaces (Science, Music & Arts, and Flex Space Class Rooms) in place. The Ogden High preservation and expansion was a 3-phase project that largely followed these principles.
- 2) Retain the original and iconic 5-part structure along 300 West. Restore the entry foyer and north/south hallways and stairways. Program the historic structure with administrative functions, as well as select educational usage as far as possible. Where needed, combine classroom layouts into larger spaces for specific use. As has been done in the Ogden High School preservation, six smaller classrooms can typically be combined into 4 larger by maintaining the overall footprint, but with new structural interventions selectively inserted within the overall layout.

- 3) Connect the old and new structures on the south and north ends with the large school community spaces, including Auditoriums, Commons/Cafeteria. This may or may not include retaining the existing auditorium on the south side. Ultimately, a quadrangle layout will result, with the added opportunity for a safe, intimate courtyard between the buildings and at the heart of a true school campus.
- 4) We encourage the School Board to explore further density on the existing city block, to create an urban campus for the future, with the opportunity for multi-use developments on the adjoining blocks. We understand that the above plan would require rebuilding a football field/track & field facility, but this is also part of the currently proposed option 3 presented to the School Board.

If properly explored, we believe the school board may find options to offsetting any incremental preservation costs through partnerships with the community (e.g. Ogden High School Foundation raised additional funds for interior preservation of the historic auditorium) and potential re-development of adjacent properties that could be explored from the compact quadrangle plan presented above.

We believe that the School Board owes the community a full review of a new design option that can incorporate the original structure along 3rd west, with 21st century additions constructed around the original quadrangle block design facing west. This would also better engage the west side of the school property, and engage both sides of the community the school is intended to serve.