



Historic Athens

*Celebrating and conserving
community heritage*

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Historic Athens
489 Prince Avenue
Athens, Georgia 30601

Signed in Support by:
Fred Smith, Sr. and Ken Dious, J.D.

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

Clarke County School District (CCSD)
CCSD Board of Education
CCSD Superintendent, Dr. Xernona Thomas
CCSD Inter. Chief of Operations, District Services, Dr. Marsha Thomas
CCSD Community Oversight Committee
CCSD Dir. of Facility Planning & Constr., E-SPLOST, John Gilbreath
440 Dearing Ext., Athens, GA 30606

Dear CCSD,

Greetings. In September 2019, it was our pleasure to issue a joint statement between Historic Athens and Clarke County School District (available online at <http://bit.ly/ccsdhistoric>) declaring a partnership effort to preserve the historic West Broad School campus. Due to its historic significance and architectural character, as well as its unique cultural importance to local African American and educational heritage, we believe the campus is the most critically important unprotected historic landmark in Athens-Clarke County. We enthusiastically support the current plan to breathe new life into the campus by transforming it into an early learning center that can serve the community. As we move towards this revitalization, it is the informed and passionate position of our organization and the co-signers of this letter that the 1938 Minor Street building, the historic two-story Equalization-era Campbell Lane building, and the historic courtyard can all be preserved through best practices properly applied with qualified expertise and commitment to quality.

However, our repeated interactions with the current West Broad School project team (including project management and the current principal architectural leadership), have proven less than satisfactory with regard to both the stated intent of preserving the sense of place for this intact historic campus and also in the design vision presented for the reuse of the campus. Given the significance of the West Broad School as a community resource, Historic Athens has come to recognize that CCSD and the broader community would be better served by a project team with the necessary commitment, structure, and expertise to properly preserve the historic nature of the campus.



As you know, the current composition of the project team is the result of this project being bundled into a single RFP with several other distinctly different CCSD construction projects. Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in a generic, ill-fitting approach to a project that should have solicited support from professionals with very specific qualifications. The most recent presentation, held on March 8th, fully confirmed the need for a distinct RFP, and specifically an experienced design team. Terminology crucial to understanding the project was often used incorrectly, the overall presentation was of a much less serious nature than the project deserves, and the proposed renderings displayed a project that would destroy the historic sense of place noted as critically important by the public. We continued to hear that the Campbell Lane building and courtyard cannot be saved (often with little evidence presented to support such claims) despite repeated testimony from local architects, preservation advocates, and other experts. Since the current project team has presented itself as unwilling or unable to develop an early childhood education center while protecting the historic integrity and shared community memory of the West Broad School, we are compelled to ask for an immediate change to the way this project is being conducted.

We are writing today, in our capacity as your partner and with co-signed support from local community leaders Fred Smith and Ken Dious, to formally request new leadership and a principal architectural leadership team be put into place for the West Broad School project. As your partner, we have examined the buildings and site in person, as well as consulted with preservation and architectural experts about the future of the full campus, including the historic courtyard and the three historic structures. This letter has been informed by those inspections and professional consultations. While we support the planned use of the site and are happy to continue working with CCSD staff, as your partner we strongly encourage you to position a project team that will provide a careful and respectful treatment of the historic site.

Again, we support the intended use for the site and are fully cognizant of the code-related requirements of educational facilities and the criteria of the project's funding, we have become convinced that the current team is not structured in a way that can properly complete the project. Therefore, we are asking for you to proceed in one of the two following ways:

1. **Release a new RFP for the West Broad Campus, to secure a project team that is able to meet the specific demands of this unique historic site and project.** It has become clear that the West Broad School project deserves a project management team that shares the greater vision of preserving the campus while retaining as high a degree of historic integrity as possible. We believe that this would be best accomplished by seeking a new project team, with the following five essential qualifications for the principal architect: (1) local familiarity, (2) recognized as a preservation architect, (3) robust understanding of preservation best practices, (4) knowledge of - and respect for - the history of African American school campuses and architecture, (5) proven ability to meet building code requirements.
2. **Re-assign Barbara Black as Principal Architect for this project, alongside a new Project Manager.** While preservation architect Barbara Black has been asked by the current team to utilize



her preservation experience for the single 1938 building, she has not been appointed as principal architect for the campus. We have observed that the current arrangement has not allowed her to apply her expertise beyond a single structure. This has all but ensured that preservation cannot exist outside that single building. Also, if a new RFP is not issued and CCSD feels committed to its current staff, then a restructuring should be necessary that establishes a new Project Manager with Barbara established as Principal Architect for the site. We have not been given reason to believe that preservation is a significant priority for any of the current project leadership, so a new Project Manager should be selected that intends to blend the needs of the intended use with the critical historic resources on site.

Thank you for considering this necessary step as we only have one chance to fully realize the potential of this historic site. Given our community's and nation's increasing awareness of the history of the erasure of African American spaces, it is more important than ever to have a committed and conscious team in place to protect the heritage of this community that is reflected in this site. It would be a false choice to suggest that we cannot prepare for the future of the site while also properly honoring its past. Furthermore, given our community's history of investing in the preservation of formerly white segregated historic school buildings and campuses, we believe strongly that we have an urgent responsibility to show similar respect and consideration for the West Broad School.

We look forward to continuing to work with you as site partners for this campus and other future historic projects. We would be happy to discuss the matter further. Our contact information is listed below.

Sincerely,

Tommy Valentine
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Signed in Support by:

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Executive Director, EADC
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Ken Dious, Attorney
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