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Cincinnati Preservation Association's offer to purchase, restore James N. Gamble House denied

Greenacres Foundation rejects offer; said it will demolish the house

CPA Reaffirms Commitment to Renovating and Operating the Historic James N. Gamble House at No Cost to Greenacres Foundation

(WESTWOOD, OHIO) Cincinnati Preservation Association today learned Greenacres Foundation has rejected its proposal to purchase and restore the historic James N. Gamble House in Westwood.

At Greenacres' invitation, CPA submitted the proposal to stabilize and restore the 1870s-era Victorian Italianate villa in April 2010. At that time, the preservation corporation said it would establish an endowment for the ongoing operational needs of the house, as well as help identify a new user, and requested access to the property on several occasions to assess the extent of its disrepair.

Greenacres sent a letter projecting the cost to restore the building is at least \$2,000,000: twice the cost estimated by CPA experts. This figure also is substantially higher than the amount the City of Cincinnati's consulting architect projected in his report. CPA requests to walk through the building with architects, engineers, and restoration specialists in an effort to address the differing cost estimates were rejected by Greenacres.

In the letter, Greenacres said it is now promoting a reuse plan that would demolish the house, but recreate four of its rooms for public display in the historic James N. Gamble barn.

"Needless to say, we're disappointed by this turn of events, because our offer was produced from a thoughtful process," according to Paul Muller, interim executive director, Cincinnati Preservation Association. "We remain committed to the preservation of the James N. Gamble House, and believe it will yet be saved."

(more)

“The house cannot be demolished due to its Landmark designation by the city of Cincinnati,” Muller continued. The historical value and importance of the house is demonstrated by the fact that the three public entities that had to approve the designation did so unanimously.”

Aside from its legal protection, Muller, a principal of an architecture practice that bears his name, said the house should be saved on both its historic and aesthetic merits.

“Context is an extremely important aspect of an historic building’s value. Removing a few rooms to a barn will destroy the context of the rooms as well as trivialize the history of the barn. Ironically, the house’s connection to its setting is one of the great stories it has to tell. The Gamble House represents the specific point in American architectural history where people began searching for ways to connect buildings to nature. Everything about the design is a record of the connection of a house to its natural setting. The bays, porches, towers, shutters, and entries are elements that respond to nature. Some of them bring the outside in, some keep it out and others adjust as the seasons and breezes change. This is a story that Greenacres, with its commitment to nature education should be happy to tell.”

One argument for the house’s demolition is that it is not grand and impressive. The house is modest, especially when you consider the houses of James N. Gambles peers. John D. Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and others that he associated with built monuments that are easily identified as historically important. The modest scale and domestic qualities of the James N. Gamble House should not be used to justify its destruction; those are a reflection of the man himself. Stories abound of his generosity and genuine interest in people from all walks of life.

It is important to note the house cannot be demolished due to its Landmark designation by the city of Cincinnati. The historical value and importance of Gamble’s house is demonstrated by the fact that all three public entities that had to approve the designation did so unanimously.

The argument that the house is so rundown that it must be demolished is the proverbial orphan in front of the judge. For decades the house was maintained to meticulous standards under the caring stewardship of Louis Nippert. CPA recognized this with a Preservation Award in 1991. Mr. Nippert also restored the James N. Gamble house in Florida before gifting it to the local community. Today that house is open for tours and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The house is important on many counts: James N. Gamble is arguably one of the most significant figures in the history of Cincinnati. His work in shaping American industrial systems is the tip of the iceberg. He also had a commitment to civic activities that has been an inspiration to generations. Watching the effort to demolish the historic house is like watching a civic tragedy unfold in slow motion. And it is completely unnecessary. CPA is prepared to take on the cost of renovation and operating the house. The house can complement the program of Greenacres without cost to them.

Moreover, the Westwood community cherishes the Gamble House and cares passionately about saving it. “The presence of the house in the neighborhood is a powerful, positive element” said Margo Warminski, Preservation Director of CPA. “Removing four rooms to the barn totally squanders this value.” Over the past six months, residents have written hundreds of letters, sat through endless meetings, and crowded the sidewalk on a freezing afternoon to show their support for saving the house. The Westwood Historical Society prepared the successful City landmark nomination, a beautifully written and carefully researched

document” The “Save the Historic Gamble House Facebook” page has over two thousand followers, and is a trove of historical information about James N. Gamble.

The biggest preservation issue in the city in decades, the Gamble House controversy has united people throughout the region. With the support of preservationists across the city, CPA continues to work for a way to save this landmark building. CPA is seeking to meet with the Greenacres Board to forge a solution that meets their needs and preserves this important historic site for all of Cincinnati.

Background:

James N. Gamble was a civic leader, industrialist, and Mayor of the Village of Westwood. In his work with the family business, the Procter & Gamble Company, Gamble invented Ivory Soap, a groundbreaking consumer product still in production today. The property remained in the Gamble family since 1875. Upon the death in 1961 of Olivia Gamble, the last full-time resident of the house, the home was passed to Louis Nippert, who was Olivia's nephew. Mr. Nippert's care for this property is believed to be due to his love for his grandfather, James N. Gamble. In 1991, CPA presented Mr. Nippert and his wife, Louise, with an award for their stewardship of the home. Mr. Nippert died on November 17, 1992. The Greenacres Foundation is a non-profit, private, operating foundation established in 1988 by Louis and Louise Nippert.

Founded in 1964, the Cincinnati Preservation Association (formerly known as the Miami Purchase Association for Historic Preservation) is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocacy and education for the preservation of the historic built environment in Greater Cincinnati.

Web site: www.cincinnatiipreservation.org

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