

Dear members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission,

My name is Cameron Danesh and I am the founder and former president of the Historic Preservation Club at UC Berkeley. However, I write this article solely on my own behalf regarding UC Berkeley's proposal to demolish the historic Anna Head School.

I would like you to think of your favorite historical building anywhere in the world: there is a good chance that it has been neglected or seriously threatened at some time in its history. The Fox Theatre in Oakland, the Palace of Fine Arts and Ferry Building in San Francisco, even the Colosseum and Eiffel Tower. All these buildings were threatened because not enough people appreciated their significance, and efforts to save them were always met with naysayers.

Right now, I am working on saving and restoring Mystery Castle, an Arizona outsider art landmark that has also faced serious issues in recent years. We have also faced opponents who view the castle as a nuisance or wish to have it demolished for parkland. Regarding Anna Head, such a conflict is not necessary. Saving Anna Head has acknowledged that the site can be best used for housing while preserving its heritage.

From its beginning, the story of the historic preservation movement has been one of facing and overcoming daunting odds. If we just gave up when money or power seemed to be an obstacle, then very little that we know and love would be left. This is the mentality the City of Berkeley had when it first established the LPC back in 1974. It should also be the mentality that the University and all of us should have in mind regarding Anna Head.

It may not feel like you have that much power in this situation, but I sincerely believe that a strong message from the LPC is the first step towards turning things around for Anna Head. I encourage you to inform your city council members of the possibility of saving the school while still building housing.

Sincerely,
Cameron Danesh