

Jodi Baldwin
1395 Sherwood Road
Aurora, NY 13026

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Community Preservation Panel
Village of Aurora Planning Board
456 Main Street
Aurora, NY 13026

Dear Members of the Community Preservation Panel and Planning Board;

I submit this letter to express my strong **opposition** of the proposed demolition of the former McGordon House, located at 110 Main Street, tax map #193.05-1-4.

My name is Jodi, I love and appreciate history and old houses. I am blessed to live just outside of Aurora, in a historic house, which is listed on the National Registry. I am a member of Cayuga Climate Action, a board member of the Aurora Masonic Center and a board member of Preservation Association of Central New York, representing Cayuga County. I will be speaking about this house at our upcoming board meeting on April 19th.

There are two main problems I see with the demolition of any redeemable structure: permanently losing a piece of shared cultural history and the perpetuation of negative environmental choices.

Ignoring these problems and allowing demolition is an example of human arrogance and vanity.

Our shared historic culture is important. The architectural history of Aurora is important. Both to the residents, the tourists and the students of Wells College. To demolish a historic structure, one that can be reclaimed and utilized, is a vain assumption that the contractors ideas are better than what is already historically cohesive and present in the context of the historical village.

I only moved here 6 years ago, but I have read many archived articles on the deep divisions and personal trauma that making changes to Aurora's historic architectural landscape created when the Inns of Aurora took it upon themselves to re-arrange the town like a child with building blocks. It has been made very clear to me, a newcomer, that those hasty changes and the resulting emotional damage is still felt strongly, 20 plus years later.

I am a strong proponent of change, when change is required, but this proposed demolition follows the same pattern of hasty choices which have already traumatized this small community.

In my opinion, to deny the application, would be an action of change. Change that supports historic community preservation and consideration of the village as a whole unit.

I understand that housing is an immediate need and crisis in our country.

One way to address this national problem locally is to implement zoning that limits the single family homes which are removed from the housing pool for vacation rentals. I also agree that another solution is, of course, to build more housing stock, within the village limits. I personally feel that the 17.4 acre lot just at the East end of Burnham Lane, Orchard Lane and Cherry Ave (Tax Map #18.09-1-23.1) is an absolute ideal property to increase the housing stock of the quaint village of Aurora. On this size parcel, 20 - 30 individual lots could easily be surveyed, creating a plethora of single family, and a handful of multi-families, homes, which are energy efficient, modern, and designed with exteriors that reflect the local historic architectural palette, to seamlessly and harmoniously make the village available to more families.

In terms of the property in current question, there is no reason why this beautiful historic home can not be renovated to be one of the two proposed units on the property. And a second structure can be designed and built to compliment it.

For all of human history, we have been re-purposing buildings and structures to suit contemporary needs. Mainly, because it's far easier to use materials that already exist than to expend the energy required to create new building materials out of the raw materials. Stones from ancient times have been reused over and over throughout centuries, because it's easier and less energy than cutting new stone blocks. Wood and timbers have constantly be re-purposed because it requires less energy than the time it takes for trees to grow, cut them down and process them.

My own house started off as a smaller, more modest home, built in the Federalist style, and was renovated, very likely taken down to the studs, before being renovated to an Italianate style home 40-50 years after the original was assembled.

Augustus Howland could have very easily torn it down and built a new house elsewhere, but WHY WOULD HE?? It's easy to understand why, in the mid 1800s why people would put in the time to re-purpose materials. Labor and time was cheap and available. Today we have machinery.

But that is exactly why demolition of a redeemable historic structure is arrogant.

It is arrogant for us to be living as such wasteful consumers.

It is arrogant for us to assume that there is an endless supply of materials, constantly at our disposal. AND on the flip side, and endless amount of space to use as landfills.

It is arrogant for us to re-design and dominate this entire world for the purpose of our disposable, consumer lifestyle.

This disposable mentality is not that old. Planned obsolescence as an idea and actual marketing strategy was only devised in the years following World War II. But in only 80 years of humans being carefully trained to think, act, and live according to these consumer patterns, look at the damage we have caused to this planet. To animals. To ourselves. When will we change course??

We change course at each opportunity like this proposed demolition, where we say no.

No, we will not allow the waste of perfectly good materials, a perfectly good house.

We DO NOT approve of this demolition.

In terms of actual cost and jobs and economic impact. From my point of view, and experience the job to renovate the farmhouse would cost less than to build new, even if it is stripped to the studs.

And just as many people, or perhaps even more, could be employed in the specific, more detail oriented work of renovation than a piece of heavy machinery and one operator simply tearing it down.

Renovating the historic house would also provide opportunities to work with the community in Cayuga County to re-purpose and salvage materials that perhaps will not be kept in the farmhouse. If the windows are going to be replaced, if the old floorboards will be coming up, if lighting fixtures are being removed - these are all materials that can be salvaged.

Cayuga Climate Action is actively working with Cayuga County to create a business, centered in the Auburn area, that is similar to Significant Elements and Ithaca Re-Use. A small business where donations of salvaged building materials go and are sold for profit. There is active interest for this business model to exist in Cayuga County for the double bonus of economic benefits and environmental benefits.

Saving the McGordon house and renovating it is a win win.

It could be a showcase piece to work with other organizations within Cayuga County to establish this small business model and showcase the direction that Cayuga County wants to embrace, moving forward in a way that is not just profit driven, but creating a sustainable future.

Denying the demolition application also sets a precedence for other development in the area. The attempts Governor Hochul is making at passing legislation to bypass local zoning codes and set building quotas and the recently passed SB9 in California, allowing single family units to change to up to fourplexes, raise some obvious concerns. Hopefully, housing is mostly addressed by increasing density in urban areas, where jobs are available, public transportation is accessible and other social amenities are in place.

But, there is no denying that this huge need for housing will keep chipping away at our beloved rural landscapes. By establishing the community desire to save historic properties and renovate them thoughtfully for modern use, the CPP and PB are making it clear that we will not hastily submit to the profit driven frenzy of developers.

Building and development planning must continue to be a thoughtful process, for equity, for safety, for the environment, for our farmland and wild spaces. We want to accommodate and create a future where enough housing is available and affordable, but we want to do so in a way that preserves our shared history and is in alignment with conserving all the resources of our generous earth.

Sincerely,

Jodi Baldwin

Owner / Creator
Howland Farm Museum