



PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

for greater philadelphia

March 25, 2010

Robert Francis, Ed.D., HAIA
Vice President University Facilities
Drexel University
3330 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Via email to: robert.a.francis@drexel.edu

Dear Dr. Francis,

Although I was not able to attend the meeting on March 19th regarding the design proposal for the URBN Center to be housed in the former ISI Building, Ben Leech of my staff did attend and informed me about the discussion and shared illustrations of the proposed design with me. In addition, I have spoken to others who attended the meeting. It is my understanding that you invited further comments after the meeting and therefore I am sending you this letter on behalf of the Preservation Alliance.

As you may know the Preservation Alliance is the nonprofit advocacy organization for historic preservation in Philadelphia. The Alliance regularly comments on matters related to historic properties through public review processes and directly to property owners and architects. We have a strong interest in the issue of mid-century Modern architecture and have nominated or supported the nomination of several important mid-20th century buildings to the Philadelphia Register. In addition, we have prepared an historic context statement about Modern architecture in Philadelphia (at www.preservephiladelphia.org) and will be preparing an initial inventory of Modern buildings this summer. In addition, let me note that I am the author of *Philadelphia Architecture, A Guide to the City*, the definitive guide to Philadelphia architecture. The ISI Building is included in the guidebook. I was also the author of the profile of the Venturi firm in the publication *Master Builders*.

I am sure I have no need to tell you about the importance of the ISI Building as an example of the work of Robert Venturi. It is a classic example of one of Venturi's most important concepts about architecture, that of the "decorated shed." In my opinion, this building is as historically and architecturally significant as the Drexel

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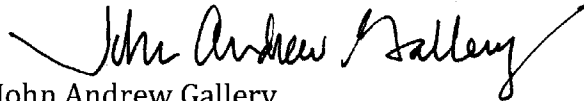
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Main Building by the Wilson Brothers and the Centennial Bank / Paul Peck Alumni Center by Frank Furness. The high standards that Drexel has applied to the maintenance and restoration of those two buildings should apply equally to the ISIS Building.

The significant aspect of this building is its exterior envelope. Therefore, the plans for interior modifications proposed by Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle to adapt the building to a new use do not raise concerns, except as they result in changes to the exterior. Preservation of the south façade in its exact historic character — complete with the ISI sign — is essential. Equally important is the relationship of the south and east facades. Exposure of the structural system at the southeast corner and the entire window treatment of the east façade are wholly inappropriate and greatly diminish the historic significance of the building. The vertical strip of windows on the east façade at the corner reduces the south façade to the appearance of a narrow band, independent of any connection with the rest of the building. It is, in my view, extremely important to retain the narrow bands of windows on the east façade for a substantial length along that façade in order to place the south façade in its appropriate context. I hope you will ask the architects to reconsider the approach to the east façade and to recognize that it is integral to the historic significance of the south façade.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for public comment on this project. I hope that Drexel will demonstrate that it respects the historic significance and integrity of this important example of 20th century architecture to the same degree that it has respected the significance and integrity of its important 19th century buildings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Andrew Gallery". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

John Andrew Gallery
Executive Director