

By Mary Ann Krzemien

I am writing this letter in response to plans by the One World Health Center to build two buildings at the site of the historic Omaha Livestock Exchange building. The work of the One World Health Center is of great value to people of South Omaha and my congratulations go out to them for winning a federal grant that will enable their expansion. I believe that it is vitally important, however, that alternative scenarios in placement of the building or buildings be seriously considered!

At present one can clearly view all sides of the Livestock Exchange Building; the front and two sides are completely unobstructed and gorgeous! Especially so is the facade of the building's east side. If the two proposed buildings are constructed, one to the East-North of the front of the building and the other to the East-South (and each one four stories in height) viewing, filming or photographing the site will be severely limited.

One would be able to view film or photograph the complete facade of building while standing in the street in front of the building, or on the property of Phillips Manufacturing across the street, or at some distance across the interstate on 25th and 26th street. Or one could take an aerial helicopter view as the architect's renderings depict. But no other viewing, filming or photographing will be able to be done of the building's facade without being obstructed by one or other of the two proposed buildings.

The ramifications of this proposed building plan are serious and weighty (and in my opinion, staggering) for many reasons. Hundreds of wonderful photos have been taken of the building over the decades, from several vantage points, since the building of the Livestock Exchange Building in 1926. (A few of them are attached to this letter). The Nebraska Historical Society, the Douglas County Historical Society, The Nebraska History Magazine, the Durham Museum have extensive holdings. But what kind of photos will be able to be taken of the area in future by historians and others, for use in records, historical books and magazines if the two proposed buildings are built? ONLY direct frontal views or aerial views!

Filming or photographing by Nebraska tourism ventures and promotional literature would also be seriously limited! And of course the citizens of the area, the state, and of the nation who have enjoyed and appreciated, and wish to continue to enjoy and appreciate this majestic building will never again be able to view the building in its full scope!

As I drive West, almost daily, along Q street from 26 to 30 streets I enjoy turning to my right to catch awesome glimpses of the Livestock Exchange Building. The sight fills me with an enormous sense of pride and well being! I also love this view from the solid, ceiling to floor north facing windows of the South Metro Community Campus! (Thank you Metro Community College!) As I drive along L street West of 25th street, or enter the Kennedy Freeway, or approach the exit to L street from the freeway I and other drivers are treated to a magnificent, virtually unobstructed view of this architectural wonder that is the Livestock Exchange Building!

My grandfather, my father, and several uncles spent their entire work careers in packing houses close to the Livestock Exchange Building. Three other uncles came to the building from Duncan, Nebraska regularly to sell their livestock. The building holds great symbolic values and memories for my family!

My heart fills with gratitude to think that the state of Nebraska and the city of Omaha gave its citizens such a wondrous gift! It would appear that no expense was spared in the creation of this structure, built in

Romanesque revival and Northern Italian Renaissance Revival style by Omaha's own - Peter Kiewit and Sons! What artistry and genius are expressed! Viewing the building literally takes my breath away - just as does the viewing of our State Capitol in Lincoln, or the many magnificent architectural treasures in Washington D.C. The Livestock Exchange Building is not just Omaha and Nebraska's treasure, but a national.....a world class treasure! It is a gift we must protect, as best we can, for the generations yet to come!

Some would say, "Let's be practical - forget about the aesthetics, forget about all this poetry about beauty of the Livestock Exchanged Building. The new proposed buildings are needed, let's not waste time. Don't stand in the way of progress! If you want to have a great view of the facade of the building, then stand in front of it! Or get into a helicopter - or take a bunch of photos and film footage of the South East and North East of building before the new multi-million dollar buildings are constructed!"

I would respond that beauty, and the preservation of beauty is gifts to humanity! Beauty reinvigorates and calms the soul! It can inspire all the best that humanity is capable of! Beauty can touch the human heart at its deepest levels! Beauty can reveal glimpses of the glory of the Creator!

Symbols can evoke many levels of meaning and feeling. They can mobilize, inspire, invigorate individuals as well as much larger groups of people - and entire armies! The Omaha Livestock Exchange Building is a powerful symbol, and many pages could be written about the multiple levels of meaning this symbol holds for people of this region! But it is also a national symbol! It is said to be the most important extant property in the country associated with the history of the stockyards and meat packing industry!

I plead with One World Community Center to allow our citizens to retain and preserve, unencumbered, AT LEAST TWO of the three vantage points of the facade of our historic building. The proposed structure on the South end could be made larger, and a few stories higher so that the North campus of the building could be preserved as it are.

The entire site, at present, is glorious! NuStyle Company along with its architects and other laborers did a superlative job with the repair, painting and window replacement of the building, the planting of so many lovely trees, and overall design of the campus!

Interest in historic places is growing as it will continue to grow. I've observed this in travel magazines, books and other literature, especially as available in our bookstores and internet! I am certain that there will be ever greater interest in our historic site as decade's progress. As part of the recognized historic value that the 24th street corridor has from L Street to Q Street, many people will want to be able to get closer to the Livestock Exchange Building than the view from 26th and L, M, N or O streets across the interstate. It is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places! It will be like shooting ourselves in the foot or cutting part of a branch on which we sit to block two of the three vantage points we have of the building's facade! It would be short sighted not to look beyond the present to the tourism potential of the future! If both the buildings are built as presently planned, they will be permanent!

I'm a great appreciator (and owner) of great movies, especially those with historic buildings and places. I'm convinced that in future a Jack Nicholson or a Matthew Broderick, or some other actor, writer, or director that appreciates Omaha or is location scouting in the Midwest will want to capture the ambiance of our historic building in yet another Omaha movie! Perhaps a future "Bonnie and Clyde" or an "About Schmidt" part 2The Omaha Convention and Tourism Bureau proudly lists thirty three movies that have already been filmed in Omaha! (See www.visitomaha.com)

Checking google.com one can find many photos and “You Tube” shots of newly married couples, and people celebrating other special events, posing near the Livestock Exchange Building. Let’s not limit the filming and photo-taking of the many guests who choose to celebrate their major life events at one of the building’s ballrooms! I know that if I was celebrating a special event there, and the day was beautiful, I would want to take photos, or have them taken on the lovely, sun-filled area to the North of the building....with the building in the background, but not overpowering the natural beauty of the area.

Yet another issue concerns me. I am told that presently, 100+ people live on the upper floors of the building as renters. Plans are pending to accommodate 60 more elderly people in apartments on the upper floors of the proposed new structures. But what provisions have been made for the outdoor fun and recreation of all these people?

There is neither a public park nor entertainment spot within walking distance beyond the borders of the property. As for the campus itself, there is a cement walkway completely surrounding the building which abuts parking spaces and a circular drive. There is a small sitting area on the sidewalk at rear of building, and another on the north sidewalk which residents and guests can enjoy. On this north bench (or standing on the walkway) people can take in a very peaceful, lovely, unobstructed view of the campus and L Street Bridge and city structures beyond. In addition to the circular walkway, there is, north of the building, a play area for children, plus picnic structures. This area would disappear if the North building is constructed. There are no other outdoor paths, trails, and recreation or play areas on the campus. It would be so great if this beautiful area, in proximity to, and just North of the main entrance was left undisturbed! No one doubts the physical and mental health benefits for families and the elderly to have these recreational areas available!

Douglas County Care Center, for example, has a very beautiful garden several acres large for its residents, complete with walking paths, a fountain, plentiful plants and flowers cared for the Douglas County Extension Society, a vegetable gardening area for the residents, picnic tables, an area for playing horseshoes and more!

If the North side of the campus could be left intact, I would continue to feel great pride driving by and viewing the building daily and would continue to be excited to visit the building for special events; I would also pursue my interest in volunteering as a tour guide of the 24th street corridor (which includes the Livestock Exchange Building.) And very importantly, I would want to continue to bring people who need care to our wonderful One World Health Center!

Respectfully,

Mary Ann Krzemien

p.s. The Biblical story of David and Goliath has been coming to mind a lot lately!

