

March 14, 2008

Save Manning's is disappointed that the Benaroya Company is challenging not only the Manning's/Denny's designation as a City of Seattle landmark but also the validity of the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance itself. The owner's response is no surprise, however. Rather than valuing Ballard's recent past heritage and being creative about including the building in any future development, the owner has chosen a confrontational and potentially destructive path. This self-interested approach goes against established and accepted preservation practices and law.

The landmark nomination submitted by the owner was thoroughly vetted through the rigorous landmarks process and the Board made its decision based on what was legally presented to them in an open public forum. After extensive deliberation, the Board voted to designate the Manning's/Denny's Building as a landmark based on the criteria as set out by the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance. It is important to note that not every nomination brought before the Board receives a positive nomination and fewer still are designated; these decisions are made thoughtfully and carefully by a carefully selected, and experienced panel that is appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council.

Yes, the owner has a right to follow the administrative appeal process, and if not successful, will proceed with the lawsuit in Superior Court. The action of filing the lawsuit while proceeding with the administrative appeal process is an obvious scare tactic—it is an attempt to threaten the City, the Landmarks Preservation Board, and staff to apply pressure to produce the developer's desired outcome in the controls and incentives negotiation process. The owner hopes the Board will back down and place no controls on the building, thereby clearing the way for the rapid demolition of a landmark.

It's one thing to try to overturn the Board's decision. It's another to go after the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance itself. The attack on the ordinance is a vindictive action by those who feel a great sense of entitlement. Rather than braying about how they've been "injured" from an economic standpoint or deprived of their "rights," why not use their seemingly endless energy and resources to propose a win-win solution—one that preserves the building (not as a boarded up Denny's but as a rehabilitated building), allows for an economically viable new development, and enhances the neighborhood? We have repeatedly shown there is a feasible alternative to demolition. Save Manning's is not anti-development. We are *for* sensitive and appropriate new development within the context of Ballard and Seattle's existing built environment.

Another solution would be for the Benaroya Company to sell the property to another developer that has the wherewithal to approach new development creatively and preserve the building.

We live in a society that creates rules and processes to determine and protect the public interest; for many decades, regulations related to historic preservation have been validated by our legislative and judicial branches. Preservation is not just about “aesthetics.” It’s also about valuing the cultural and architectural heritage of a diverse society. Resources that represent all socioeconomic strata are significant. Preservation also makes economic sense. Decades ago, landowners fought landmark designation of buildings in Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market. Think where our city would be without the tourist dollars generated by these two historic districts. Historic preservation seeks to protect the environs of the many, not just the financial gain of the few.

The Manning’s/Denny’s Building has been a Ballard icon from the day it was built. After extensive public comment and careful deliberation, it has been formally recognized as a City of Seattle Landmark. The Landmarks Preservation Board’s decision should be honored and upheld. Let this decision stand; it was made thoughtfully, appropriately and legally.