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Subject: save Burnham please

To: "kloppch@u4sd.org" <kloppch@u4sd.org>, "armstram@u4sd.org" <armstram@u4sd.org>, "shannoka@u4sd.org" <shannoka@u4sd.org>, "richarka@u4sd.org" <richarka@u4sd.org>, "bakerga@u4sd.org" <bakerga@u4sd.org>, "vazquehe@u4sd.org" <vazquehe@u4sd.org>

Dear school board members,

First, thank you for your service to our community. I write as an educator, a Champaign resident, and taxpayer and parent of two very successful Champaign Central graduates. I am a strong supporter of public education and have dedicated my work-life to and entrusted my children futures in public education. I voted to keep Central, central. But, I do not see the long-term value in destroying this asset that is hard to quantify in the grand scheme of this large scale, complicated, change and renovation.

Part of what makes schools unique and in many cases, innovative, are the ways in which their leaders face challenges and the ways they use resources. All challenges have easy solutions – in this case, raze the building and put up a parking lot. (An expensive solution but the easiest in the short term.)

Given the historical significance and the convenient locale of the Burnham home, it is a unique opportunity to extend what will be a much needed, modern high school to a significant piece of the past that can be used to add context, character and a real learning lab for future Central students. I can think of so many subject/content areas that would be enriched by locating them in this space, especially for learner like myself who though I can learn in almost any environment, enjoy learning best in a creative, inviting and warm context. This home has so many possibilities for this kind of enhancement to the new Central.

I cannot fathom the mathematical equation that proves that 25 parking spaces is greater than using this treasure of a building in a new function as a learning space. Surely, there are models/benchmarks out there where schools have done something similar. Surely, there are architects or architectural programs that would be interested in partnering with the Board in planning the space to be used in this way. Surely, there are private funds that support this kind of innovation.

And surely, there is a majority of the members of this board who in spite of the easy decision to tear it down, want to investigate the potential we have here to not only keep Central central, but also to use its geographic setting to the fullest and turn that into an asset and unique feature of the new school.

It's not the easy decision. I get that. But it's the best decision. I count on the Board to vote for the best decision. Twenty-five additional parking spaces will not make a bit of positive impact on student outcomes. But learning at Burnham certainly will.

Thank you again for your service to our school system and community.

Sincerely,

Catherine Kirby
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