

## Historic Richmond / Partnership for Smarter Growth / Preservation Virginia

July 12, 2024

Art and Architectural Review Board  
Director of the Department of General Services  
Commonwealth of Virginia  
Office of the Director  
1100 Bank Street, Suite 420  
Richmond, VA 23219

### **Re: Pocahontas Building West Tower (former State Planters' Bank Building) In Downtown Richmond**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for your efforts to rehabilitate state-owned buildings in and around Capitol Square. We are grateful to the Commonwealth of Virginia for devoting resources to the care and maintenance of the many historic structures on Capitol Square and in the Commonwealth of Virginia's property portfolio.

As a community stakeholders and nonprofits with interests in historic preservation, neighborhood revitalization, smart development, and conservation, we have followed projects involving state-owned buildings in and around Capitol Square and in Downtown Richmond with great interest. We have a history of proactively and positively partnering with the Commonwealth on Capitol Square projects going back many decades and including Old City Hall and the Barbara Johns Building. We successfully advocated for saving the historic 1912 Life of Virginia façade of the General Assembly Building and its incorporation into a beautiful new GAB. Both the Old City Hall restoration and the new GAB were awarded prestigious community-driven Golden Hammer Awards in 2023.

We understand that the proposed demolition of the Pocahontas Building West Tower is on the Consent Agenda of the July 12, 2024 meeting of the Art and Architecture Review Board (AARB). **We are writing to request that this item be deferred or, if that is not possible, be moved to the regular agenda to allow a public discussion.**

Known originally as the State Planters Bank, then as United Virginia Bank, this 1923 steel tower was designed by Clinton & Russell, a New York firm known for constructing early steel skyscrapers. The limestone façade, with its lavishly carved Ionic colonnade with cast iron screen is impressive and contrasts handsomely with the Mutual Building and First & Merchants Bank Building on opposite corners of 9<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets. Together, these three buildings reflect Richmond's transformation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century into a modern metropolis and banking center. The use of architects with a national reputation and impressive Classical facades contribute to a distinctive sense of place along 9<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets akin to New York City's Wall Street district. These early skyscrapers not only make a significant contribution to Richmond's architectural legacy, but also have proved eminently adaptable in recent years for modern office environments and as residential and hotel

properties. We understand that this building also is suitable for rehabilitation and adaptive reuse. This building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and Virginia Landmarks Register.

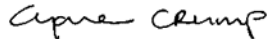
To our knowledge, this proposed demolition has not been discussed publicly before, nor has it been discussed with the Capitol Square Preservation Council, our organization or any other community group. As a result, there has been no discussion with the public regarding:

1. Why this 100,000 square foot historic structure needs to be demolished;
2. What will replace it (for example, several recently demolished historic structures have been replaced by low-rise parking decks or surface parking);
3. The design for its replacement;
4. How its replacement will interface with, enhance or otherwise impact the City of Richmond; and
5. Whether there are alternate locations around Capitol Square for a new State Courts Building that would not necessitate demolition of a historic structure.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts. Any demolition of historic structures in and around Capitol Square and any designs for any new buildings in and around Capitol Square deserve careful consideration and the opportunity for input from citizens and organizations committed to preserving Capitol Square's and the City of Richmond's distinctive architectural character and sense of place. We hope you will take our comments into consideration.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,



Cyane B. Crump  
Executive Director  
Historic Richmond



Elizabeth S. Kostelny  
Chief Executive Officer  
Preservation Virginia



Richard Hankins  
Executive Director  
Partnership for Smarter Growth