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To Whom It May Concern:

In November 2016, I spoke with Carla Weinheimer and Erica Ceder of DLR Group and reviewed a draft of their proposals for renovating The Portland Building. They wanted to see what Michael Graves Architecture & Design (MGAD) would think about their strategies for renovating and updating the building that we originally designed in the 1980's. I was impressed to see what a thorough, realistic and respectful proposal they had produced. We enthusiastically supported the proposed recommendations that the DLR Group and Howard S. Wright submitted in their report labeled DAR #2 and dated December 19, 2016. I wrote a letter of support that was included in that report. We do care a great deal about The Portland Building and are pleased to see such a comprehensive approach to renovating the building.

When the Portland Building was designed, I was in graduate school and one of Michael Graves' students at Princeton University. The project was an extremely important contribution to architecture at the time and much discussed by everyone in academia and the profession. After graduate school, I started working in Michael's office in February 1982 and The Portland Building was under construction. The years when we were working on The Portland Building represented a key turning point in architecture, academia and our firm's history.

I would also like to note that from our perspective, as the designers of The Portland Building, we would be happy to see the building improved and modernized and do not believe that all the details would necessarily need to be slavishly replicated. For example, the windows should be updated to clear glass and not simply match the original black glass, and if the size of the glass area can be increased even a bit, that would be for the better. I think the recommendations by DLR Group and Howard S Wright strike an appropriate balance between respect and improved performance.

Michael Graves often discussed with us that he wished there was a way to renovate The Portland Building comprehensively and not as a series of local patch repairs, and he asked me several times if I had any suggestions. I know that Michael Graves would also have been supportive of this proposal and thrilled to see this happening.

Earlier this year, MGAD was added to The Portland Building Design Build team so that we could be a regular part of the conversation and at times provide some historical background on certain topics. We still have the primary material from the project in our archives and have used these files to answer some of the questions. I have also spoken with Lisa Lee Morgan, who was the architect responsible for the project in our office from the beginning of the competition through construction and the building opening. Lisa said that every decision on the building involving materials and details was driven by the need to find the lowest cost solution. Some of the important topics that we have participated in discussing are as follows:

## 1. POSTMODERNISM

The Portland Building played a significant role in the evolution of architecture in the early 1980s and was the single most important project in this revolution. I would like to briefly describe the historical context.

Much of the architecture produced in the 1950s – 1970s in America had become very sterile, inhumane and repetitive. The excitement and variety of the modern work of the first half of the century had by mid-century evolved into a very narrow point of view about how we should design our buildings. Architectural history and theory had become discounted in the schools and students were taught a very uniform and formulaic approach to modern design. Students were not to have unique ideas, or look at history, but to design as they were instructed – and by the 1970s, our built environment was showing the results of so much bland thinking.

In 1966, Robert Venturi, a Philadelphia-based architect, published a book called "*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*," which was a gentle manifesto rebelling against the current formulaic and inhuman modernism that was widely being practiced in America. He compared many contemporary buildings and details to other historical and vernacular examples to demonstrate how rich the pre-modern work was, and how inhuman and sterile the current modern work was to experience.

This book led to a major debate in the profession and academia, one that sought to challenge Modernism and reintroduce architectural history. Some members of the profession found that much of current modern architecture and urban design were in fact very disappointing when compared to historical examples. By the mid to late 1970s, some architects in academia started incorporating historical lessons in their teaching and professional work. Michael Graves was one of the early converts, leading architects and students on this path. He embraced history wholeheartedly and challenged the established modern architecture norms. In the late 1970s the architectural critic Charles Jencks became a convert to this point of view, began writing about it and labeled the movement Postmodernism.

Postmodernism versus Modernism played out as a heated battle in the architecture and urban design professions from the late 1970s to the late 1980s and some of the architects still subscribing to mid-century established Modernism took this very personally and were ready to fight for their position. The Modernists took comfort in the fact that up until the 1980s there were no major Postmodernist projects built, and they perceived that the Postmodernists could not succeed in getting a significant commission. Up to that time the Postmodernist work was mostly small in scale, such as house additions, or never built designs existing on paper only. The Modernists simply did not take the Postmodernists seriously.

Then, in 1980 Michael Graves won the commission for The Portland Building with a Postmodernist design and everything changed in our profession. Michael and the office were driven not merely to design a building for The City of Portland but also as a revolutionary challenge to the architecture profession. Michael promoted using color and historical references. He promoted the traditional city over the modern

city. He was critical of the prevailing point of view that saw the building as a “functional machine” and wanted to design something more joyful for people.

The Portland Building opened the door for many more Postmodernist projects in the decade ahead. It gave Postmodernism a significant role in the profession and the debates were taken more seriously afterwards. The debates and exuberance of the 1980s were in the long run very healthy for our profession and our built environment. Since that time, we have accepted that history does indeed have many important lessons to teach us, that we are designing for people, how one experiences the building does matter, that we can do better than produce formulaic banality, and that it is OK to use color, etc.

At the time of its design and over the years since, The Portland Building has generated much debate. There are those that admire the building and those that don't. One thing about the building is certain is that The Portland Building occupies an important place in architectural history.

## **2. CHARACTER**

The Portland Building is a collage of historical references and symbols. The building is colorful and the intent was to create a joyful, spirited addition to the city. The building is composed in a somewhat traditional manner with a base, middle, and top. The building steps up from its base and it is articulated to relate to both the human scale and the broader city scale.

The composition and character of the building were the most important parts of the design. What materials were used would not have mattered very much to Michael Graves, particularly when faced with such a low budget.

## **3. FAÇADE MATERIALS**

Michael Graves' original intent for the facades was to use glazed terra cotta tile over the entire building, mostly in larger pieces. He wanted the building to be colorful and cheerful, even in gray weather. He also thought this would be an appropriate material for a rainy climate. A materials study and cost estimate was prepared for the glazed terra cotta tile facades by the Hoffman & Pavarini contractor team and Gladding McBean, a manufacturer in California that specialized in glazed terra cotta tiles. This study demonstrated that glazed terra cotta tile was going to be too expensive to meet the very low budget established in the design build competition.

Michael was disappointed that he could not use glazed terra cotta tiles for the façade but he was determined to find a way to get within the budget. Thus, the facades were changed to mostly stucco and some inexpensive tile work in smaller sizes was included as a cheaper version of the originally intended terra cotta tile.

After the first round of the competition representatives of the City of Portland had expressed their concern about using stucco as a finish material on the exterior of a large public building. The competition evolved into a second round where the

design build teams were asked to respond to the city's concerns on a number of topics pertinent to each design. We were asked to find an alternative to stucco. Our structural engineer, Vincent DeSimone, and the Hoffman / Pavarini contractor team came up with a way to reduce cost by building the facades in concrete, using this as part of the structural system, and then painting the concrete as a façade finish. George Pavarini called Michael on a Sunday morning to say he had solutions for getting in the budget, but he needed to meet with Michael urgently to convince him. This resulted in a meeting that Sunday afternoon in our office where George Pavarini presented Michael with the cost estimates and the limited options. In that meeting Michael said, *"I don't care if we have to make this building out of \*\*\*\*\* oatmeal, we have to stay within this crazy budget."*

That is how the facades became painted concrete. Painted concrete was never an intended design choice for Michael, but rather a concession to the contractor team and budget. He had made the decision that executing the design in any manner was more important than the materials.

Michael, and our office, would be glad to see the building renovated using better materials requiring less maintenance.

#### **4. TILE & GROUT**

As noted above, the use of small ceramic tiles came from the original intent to use larger scaled glazed terra cotta tile. The ceramic was a cheaper alternative. Lisa Lee Morgan, who was the architect in our office responsible for the project, said that the 9 x 9 inch size was smaller than originally intended, but it was the most cost effective size to use, and cost was the determining factor.

I also asked Lisa Lee about the black grout, as our firm has never used black grout in any of our other projects. She said that the original grout was not black, and that we had selected a grey grout that was similar in tone to the tile color. That is consistent with how we have selected grout for tile installations over the years. We've never used black grout, and we don't know where the black grout came from.

The grout for this renovation project should not be black solely because that is what is on the building now. The grout should be as originally intended, in a grey color similar in tone to the tile color.

#### **5. COLORS**

Carla Weinheimer (lead architect at DLR Group) commented that she believes that the paint colors used in more recent repainting of the building seem to be a little brighter in color than the original colors. I searched our files and found the actual approved paint submittals from the contractor and have given these samples to DLR Group for use in this project. Carla was correct, the original colors were not quite as bright as recent repainting selections.

## 6. BLACK GLASS

The fact that black glass was used in the windows is something of an oddity for us as there is no other project in our firm's history that has used black glass. Our whole office travelled to Portland for the building dedication in October 1982 and I recall in our office tour of the building that Michael pointed out the black glass and said, "This was a mistake and we are not doing this again." And we never did use black glass again.

Michael Graves gave a presentation at Princeton University in 2008 called "*The Portland Building, 25 Years Later.*" In that talk, he noted that the black glass was not his intent. I spoke with Karen Nichols and Lisa Lee Morgan, both of whom were in our office during the project design and execution to see how black glass came to be selected. They both recall that this was a decision promoted by the architect of record, Emery Roth, the engineers and the contractor that was driven by cost and energy demands. Lisa said that we were not happy about the black glass but conceded to the decision.

We hope that the current renovation will correct this and use clear glass in the windows.

## 7. LOGGIA AREAS

In the design, it was our intent to bring the base of the building to the sidewalk and engage with the pedestrian and social life of the city. Our approach to the urban environment was more traditional and was an intentional reaction to the numerous underutilized urban plazas being developed in American cities at that time. We thought the best way to engage with the pedestrian experience was to include small retail shops and a covered loggia. I understand that over the years the retail shops have not been very successful and today the facades inside the loggia feel very closed and uninviting.

Over the past 15 years our office has done several buildings for the federal government in the GSA Design Excellence program. In each of these projects, the GSA and various government agencies have asked us to express the transparency and openness of the democratic process in our design.

In DLR Group's proposed renovation of the pedestrian level loggia façade, they have opened up the activities at the base of the building by using a glass façade inside the loggia. This will add life and activity to the base of the building and improve the experience for the people inside the building and people passing by. We also like the fact that in a government building we are promoting openness and transparency at the entry level. We think this is a great improvement.

## 8. 4th AVENUE FAÇADE

It was always unfortunate that the parking entrance had to be opposite the park, but as Lisa Lee Morgan reminded me, the only logical location for the parking entry was on the lowest side of the building.

In DLR Group's proposed renovation, the parking is eliminated. The large opening in the center of the façade will then be glass and have a common public area pre-function on the main level with a view to the park beyond. It is great that this façade will now be activated with something other than cars. We believe this façade will be greatly improved on the park side.

It is worth noting that DLR Group's current design proposal remains very respectful to the original design of the building on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Feel free to contact me at any time if you would like to discuss any of this further.

I can speak for our entire firm, and I'm sure also for Michael Graves, that we wish you all the best in this admirable endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Burke". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large 'P' and 'B'.

Patrick Burke AIA  
Senior Principal