

Many questions and comments posted here and on other social media sites are based on inaccurate information. These are some of the most common misstatements and questions and the right information:

“The buildings are slated for demo and plans are in the works to demolish the buildings”

The purchase of the buildings does not “doom” the buildings. It provides a path to preserve important architectural history. If, in the future OPAS decides to expand to that end of the block, and considers removing the buildings, it would have to get approval from the landmarks commission, the Planning Board and the Omaha City Council, just like any other private property owner that wants to take down a building. There is no guarantee it will ever be approved.

I am confident OPAS recognizes the historical significance of the Specht building. Many creative people, interested in both preserving the past and building for the future are involved in the discussion about keeping the buildings intact. Those interested in preservation of the buildings are at the table.

All along, I have said I do not support the demolition of the building, that there are many other possibilities being discussed now.

“The City caved to HDR’s threats to leave Omaha”

HDR never threatened to leave Omaha. However, its plan to build a \$130-140 million world headquarters downtown was in jeopardy if OPAS would not sell the surface parking lot at 11th & Dodge. HDR had looked at other Omaha sites, outside of downtown.

The City partners with developers all the time, we make investments in projects that benefit the community. For example, we used street bonds to pay for about \$6 million in infrastructure at the Baxter Arena and transportation bonds to pay for the streetscape project in Benson. TIF financing makes many developments possible, like AkSarBen Village, the Capitol District, First National Tower, The Lumberyard in Millard, and Highlander 75 North at 30th and Parker.

“Why would the City pay \$10 million?”

The purchase price for these properties is based on appraisals, not assessed value, relocation costs, and other costs related to a real estate transaction. The only condition of the sale is that OPAS sells that parking lot to HDR. If that sale falls through, we will not buy the buildings.

“This is a gross abuse of eminent domain”

We are not using eminent domain. The private owners are selling the properties. OPAS asked me to take the buildings by eminent domain and demolish them. I said no. I did not support eminent domain and would not agree to demolish them.

“Use the money to keep the libraries open and street repair”

We will use Redevelopment Bonds to pay for the buildings. The Nebraska Community Development Law allows cities to use these bonds in areas that qualify as Community Development Areas, such as downtown. The money can be used for acquisition, infrastructure and other uses specified in the law. It cannot be used for any other purpose like library spending, street repair or new construction. The property taxes collected by the City go into four funds: the General Fund, which includes budgets for daily operating expenses, the Judgment Fund, Debt Service Fund and Redevelopment Fund.

“Taxes are supposed to be for expenses that benefit Omaha and progress”

The HDR development does benefit Omaha. The potential expansion of the Holland Center benefits Omaha. Connecting the Old Market to north downtown benefits Omaha. New employees working downtown spend money downtown, employees may choose to live downtown. There is a trickle-down economic benefit for retailers, restaurants and other entertainment venues and all of this can lead to even more economic development in our urban core.

“Why give the properties to OPAS before you have their plans?”

OPAS has stated they would not sell their lot to HDR unless they had a guaranteed place for future expansion and parking. HDR leases the buildings on its current campus at 84th & Dodge. When the lease expires, the new building must be completed. To meet construction deadlines, HDR needs an agreement with OPAS to buy the surface parking lot at 11th & Dodge.

“Why can’t HDR move to ConAgra?”

As recently as yesterday, a ConAgra Vice-President said at a news conference, that the company’s largest workforce will remain in Omaha. The campus is not for sale.