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To the Minneapolis Zoning & Planning Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to write in support of the Heritage Preservation Commission's vote to deny the demolition of the Brenda Ueland house in Linden Hills.

Brenda Ueland immortalized Lake Harriet in her writing. She is one of the great walker-writers in a tradition that includes Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Alfred Kazin and Vivian Gornick—writers who construct a philosophy for living and capture the world as they move through it on foot. Lake Harriet sustained Brenda Ueland in body and mind. I live far from the lake now, but when I read Brenda Ueland, I am right back home:

This noon I went around Lake Harriet and two miles farther. It is more than 18 below zero. But I am warm. I wear as always my burglar suit, and under it two layers of wool underwear, and two layers of truck driver's mittens under horsehide, a Norwegian cap with a visor. I am warm in this cold, though the air is a sword in the lungs. It is very beautiful. The sun is a blare of gold in the pure blue sky and everything is so still, golden, pallidly golden. No one is out except an occasional snow plow or milk truck. The drivers stare at me, smiling through their closed-in glass cabs. Two dogs come out barking at me, but overjoyed to have a human being out and walking, and they frolic around me, their joy overcoming their hostility and their barking indignation.

Whenever I return to Minneapolis I make a pilgrimage to 2620 West 44<sup>th</sup> Street. I stand in front of the house and look up at the second floor sleeping porch with the windows on three sides, which became her studio. This was the room where Brenda Ueland imagined she was Captain Ahab, watching the whales spout on Harriet. She lived at West 44<sup>th</sup> street from age 63 to age 93, and we can attribute her longevity to the sustaining powers of walking and swimming in the lake. At age 87, in a meet at the U. of M., she broke the Master's record for her age group in backstroke and freestyle.

I understand there is an argument afoot that her Linden Hills home is not the place where she wrote her major books. I've heard similar arguments used in other preservation debates: maybe the writer wrote their major books at that address, but wasn't born there. Or maybe they were born there, but wrote somewhere else. The question seems to me to lie elsewhere. Between 1954 and 1985, Brenda Ueland transformed the West 44<sup>th</sup> street into a spontaneous literary "salon", where she welcomed many young writers, the famous and the unknown—because she was against the idea that you need special permission or status to be writer. Writers and publishers Patricia Hampl, Karen Winegar, Bruce Carlson, Eric Utne recognize her as a mentor. She was a mentor to me, though I never met her—a mentor by the example she set of a searcher, an independent woman, a risk taker who could fall and get up again. Her most important essay, "On Making Choices" was written in the house: it's an essay I never tire of reading, in which she maps out a personal ethics. During the last three decades of her life, she intuited many of the challenges of our own century—the idea of sustainability, of ecological balance. Long before it was fashionable, she considered the rights of animals.

Cities need their sacred places. Paris (a city I consider unrivaled in beauty, except perhaps by Minneapolis), understands this well: buildings associated with writers carry plaques and many writers' houses have been transformed into museums and study centers. These memory sites are a way to honor the city, to acknowledge the layers of its history. Brenda Ueland's house is perfectly placed, a few steps off the path around the lake, to be seen by thousands of walkers. Often, all it takes to inspire a new writer is the example of another writer, transmitted through the spirit of the special place that nourished them. For young girls growing up in Minneapolis especially, Brenda Ueland's house can become a compass point on their own journey, an invitation to create.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alice Kaplan".

Alice Kaplan

Dear Eric,

Here is my letter attached, on letterhead. If you need badges and symbols to attach to my name: you can say that this spring I'm a finalist for both the National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism for *Looking for the Stranger Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic* (my third NBCC nomination) and the Elle Magazine Readers' Prize for the same book in French translation; that I am a chevalier in the French order of the Légion d'honneur, a member of the usage panel of the American Heritage Dictionary, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences .winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and the Henry Adams Prize for previous books.... I've written widely about writers and the memory of place, most recently in *The Paris Review*, in an essay on the French writer Patrick Modiano, and I'm the author of a memoir about growing up in Minneapolis, *French Lessons*. In 2012 I spoke in the Hennepin County Library Pen Pals series.... TMI, whatever works for the cause!

Most important: I grew up in Minneapolis at 48th and Russell Avenue.

I hope this helps.

warmest,  
Alice