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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Central City Plaza awarded prestigious grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for Conserving Black Modernism

An adaptive re-use of buildings designed by the first certified Black architect in Wisconsin – an historic district designated by the City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in 2025 – was honored as one of 27 grant awardees recognizing efforts to protect and promote the work of African American architects in preservation, with funding through the National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund's partnership with the J. Paul Getty Foundation.

The Salvation Army, which currently owns two of the three buildings at the **Central City Plaza** (600 W. Walnut St.), Wisconsin's first Black-owned and Black-operated shopping center, is the recipient of the grant award. Specifically, the Salvation Army won for preservation planning and a Historic Structures Report related to their rehabilitation and adaptive reuse project of two of the three buildings at Central City Plaza, according to HPC senior planner **Andrew Stern**. Constructed in 1973, the center was developed by Felmers Chaney and other Black business leaders and designed in the New Formalism architectural style by Wisconsin's first registered Black architect, **Alonzo Robinson, Jr.** The Development illustrates the Black business community's response to the effects of urban renewal in Milwaukee in the 1960s and 1970s.

Central City Plaza included a motel, a restaurant, grocery store, bowling alley, liquor store and other businesses. Since then, Salvation Army has been providing social services in the former motel building since 1983 and is planning an adaptive reuse and expansion connecting the former motel with the smaller former George Hilliard Health Center building.

-More-

Grant award/ADD ONE

Alderwoman Milele A. Coggs, whose 6th Aldermanic District includes Central City Plaza, said the buildings were designed by Alonzo Robinson to incorporate certain African symbols, most notably in the building's circular windows.

"Mr. Robinson was emphasizing a spirit of resilience in his design work for Central City Plaza, as we were moving out of the most active part of the Civil Rights Movement, dealing with urban renewal displacement, and yet moving forward with our eyes on a shopping destination that Black Milwaukeeans could truly call their own," Alderwoman Coggs said.

"I am so thankful for the further recognition for this important and historic location, and for additional flowers for the award-winning work of Mr. Robinson," she said.

The grant supports the representation of Black American joy, resilience, innovation, and activism and the promotion and conservation of African American architects.