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To whom it may concern:

Attached is the text of oral testimony that I would like to provide relating to the historic residential property tax exemption at the Honolulu City Council meeting tomorrow morning (Tuesday, April 12) at Honolulu Hale. This submission represents my registration to speak at the meeting. If additional information is required, please contact me at (808)564-0654.

Thank you,

John H. Robinson

2727 Manoa Road

Honolulu, HI

City Council Testimony on Property Tax Exemption for Historic Homes
Presented by John H. Robinson of 2727 Manoa Road, Honolulu, HI
April 12, 2011

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to present my perspective on this important issue. By way of introduction, I grew up in an historic part of New England and lived in a 1770s saltbox house that my parents restored. My parents were antique dealers and instilled in me a deep appreciation of American antiques, and of the importance of communities preserving their cultural and architectural heritage. I am also the proud owner of a 1924 Colonial Revival home in Manoa. Since purchasing the home in 2010, my wife and I have endeavored to undo much of the 1980s changes and additions that were done to the home in order to restore the property's original character. For reference, our home is NOT on the State Registry of Historic homes.

In terms of my perspective on this issue, I am sympathetic to the public outcry pursuant to the media exposes that appeared in the news last summer. From those reports, it seems clear that there are property owners who are receiving significant economic benefits from the property tax exemption while failing to honor the spirit, if not the letter, of the existing ordinance. It is also clear that the current ordinance is liberal in its qualification provisions and lax in enforcement.

I also understand the City Council's interest in considering measures that would reduce or eliminate the property tax exemption for historic homes. The combination of public outcry over abuses and significant budget shortfalls makes the property tax exemption a very tempting target.

That said, my purpose in providing this testimony is to implore the Council NOT to adopt measures that would eliminate the property tax exemption for historic homes, and to state my qualified opinion that adopting such measures would be shortsighted and would almost certainly lead to the further destruction of Oahu's architectural heritage. Although I am sure there are some in our community who place little value in the importance of preserving this history, using my own neighborhood of Manoa as an example, I am sure that there are many, many people who would agree that the nostalgic sense of place one gets from driving into the valley is entirely attributable to the many wonderful old homes and bungalows that dot the streets. As an armchair student of Hawaii's architectural history, I can also

attest that, through the twin ravages of termites and development, the vast majority of Oahu's rich architectural history has already been lost, and that we should do everything we can to preserve what little remains.

It is well established on both a national and local level that property tax exemptions are an extremely effective means of preserving historic homes. In closing, consistent with the sentiments of Historic Hawaii Foundation, I cast my support behind City Council Bill 3 which seeks to improve the current ordinance. Mahalo again for this opportunity.



NY Mansion Linked to 'Great Gatsby' to Be Razed

New York mansion linked to 'The Great Gatsby' to be razed for subdivision

SANDS POINT, N.Y. March 8, 2011 (AP)

A 25-room mansion some scholars believe inspired "The Great Gatsby" is to be razed for a subdivision.

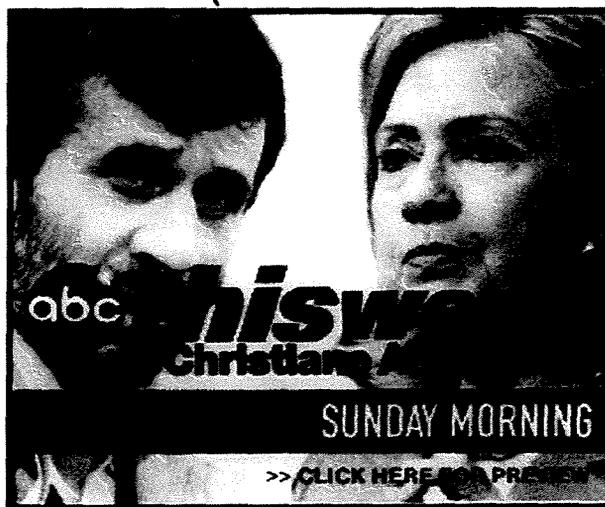
Randy Bond, village clerk in Sands Point on New York's Long Island, says it will be replaced by five houses priced at \$10 million each. The location faces the Long Island Sound.

Some F. Scott Fitzgerald experts believe the author used the sprawling 1902 property as a model for the home of character Daisy Buchanan, though the current owner believes the mansion's "Gatsby" link has been overstated.

David Brodsky says his family bought it in 2004, but says the house is beyond repair.

Historians tell Newsday, which reported the deal Sunday, that hundreds of the mansions have been lost in the past 50 years because of rising taxes and maintenance costs.

- This has happened to a similar extreme on Oahu too - not just with large mansions but also with hundreds of beautifully crafted "ordinary" homes constructed prior to 1940.



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Great Gatsby Mansion to Be Torn Down

LAVISH LONG ISLAND HOME COSTS \$4.5K A DAY TO MAINTAIN



(NEWSER) – The Gilded Age mansion said to have inspired F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel *The Great Gatsby* is doomed. Lands End, a 25-room, 24,000 square foot mansion on Long Island's Gold Coast, will be demolished later this month, *Newsday* reports. The home, site of lavish parties in the '20s and '30s, was on the market for \$30 million but failed to attract a buyer.

Taxes, insurance, and maintenance on the crumbling mansion—one of a dwindling number of survivors of thousands of mansions built in the area by wealthy New Yorkers in the 19th and early 20th centuries—cost some \$4,500 per day. Developers now plan to split the 25-acre site into five properties. "The cost to renovate these things is just so overwhelming that people aren't interested in it," says a construction manager. "The value of the property is the land." (Click to read about Baz Luhrman's upcoming film version of the book.)