

January 31, 2012

Alderman Nik Kovac
City Hall
200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Alderman Kovac,

As a resident of the third district, I am writing to ask you to oppose the Trinitas Ventures proposal for 634 E. Keefe Avenue. While the site of the proposal is immediately outside of your district, the impact of such a development would be borne by residents from throughout Riverwest.

I have serious concerns about the project's impact on every day issues for residents of my neighborhood, including parking, traffic flow, noise, and other quality of life issues, as well as the dangerous precedent I see it setting for policy and development decisions in Milwaukee.

As for quality of life concerns, this proposal would bring more than 700 people to one relatively quiet block. This area of our neighborhood was not designed to accommodate this density. The intended market for these apartments is UWM students (although UWM has stated there is ample housing for students currently, especially with the recent opening of two new dorms on North Avenue), and this density of students raises concerns about noise, parties, traffic, and other issues posed by very dense student housing in a non-university neighborhood. Since there is not the guarantee of university oversight – Trinitas says they will provide management and security, but I see no details on that very important issue – there are serious concerns about the impact neighbors. Providing apartment management and security staff is very different than providing the type of university-sponsored in-house programs that help students living in such a dorm setting and provide oversight that keeps dorm residents and neighborhood residents living in harmony, like at UWM's RiverView dorm.

Parking would become problematic for residents of Keefe, Booth, and beyond, as many of the neighbors here rely on street parking, and an influx of this many people will surely make much use of the available street parking. The level of traffic this development brings would create conflicts between truck traffic and employee parking for Tulip Corp and C&D Technologies, good employers and good business neighbors in our neighborhood. Trinitas' proposal says they plan up to 170 parking spaces for a 700-bed housing development. If this was a UWM-owned and operated dorm, we would have some assurance that the beds would be going to students who had a guaranteed shuttle to campus. However, there is no provision ensuring such operations in this private venture; therefore, the tenant base – and parking needs – are really unknowns.

As for policy implications, Milwaukee just completed its Comprehensive Area Plans, including the Northeast Area Plan, in which this property falls. The purpose of the comprehensive planning process is to determine goals for an area and guide development to build off of these goals. The plan should guide decision making to ensure that proposals that come forward, such as the one brought forth by Trinitas, are analyzed within the context of the long term goals for the area. While the plan cannot anticipate everything and is not a set of hard and fast rules, it is clear that a 700-room housing development on this block within the industrial area of the Riverworks BID is incompatible with the goals for our neighborhood as identified in the plan.

The plan states that the vision for Riverworks area is to: "enhance the Riverworks District identity, marketability and viability, as a state of the art industrial and commercial mixed use center through the support and retention of thriving businesses"...and to develop the "Riverworks Industrial Center on par with new industrial centers in the metro area, providing a walk-to-work environment, and a mix of uses that is supportive of its historic manufacturing focus." Allowing a 700-bed, non-university supported student housing development adjacent to healthy manufacturers in no way supports this vision. In fact, it says that retaining family-supporting manufacturing jobs near this site is not a high priority.

Hundreds of people gave countless hours of time attending strategic planning sessions, public meetings, and reviewing drafts to develop a strong and meaningful Northeast Area Plan. Accepting a developer's plan that so deeply conflicts with the goals of the adopted plan sends a message that strategy is not important to the City. It sends the manufacturing businesses of the Riverworks district the message that their long term future is not secure here.

The rezoning of viable industrial land in an industrial / commercial BID is very concerning to me. The economic vitality of our region depends on manufacturing. Industrial land is a very limited and very important commodity in our city. Manufacturing is critical to an export-base economy – products manufactured here and sold elsewhere bring money from elsewhere into the local economy. Manufacturing jobs pay family-supporting wages and create indirect jobs in the regional supply chain as well. While the property in question may be vacant, it is important to remember that we are still making our way out of a global recession, and are just starting to see things turn around (think of the recent announcements of Suzy's Cream Cheesecakes moving back to the city or MasterLock bringing jobs back from overseas). But when land loses its industrial zoning, it is lost for good. When things do stabilize and manufacturers are looking for space to create jobs in the city, close to a walk-to-work workforce, on public transportation lines, close to the highway, this land could be a 700-bed rooming house and the manufacturers surrounding it looking to move to an area more compatible with industrial uses.

In my professional life, I have often looked at rezoning issues in other industrial area and have relied on the City of Milwaukee's own tool for such analysis, the S.B. Friedman Study, to guide strategic decisions about contentious zoning questions. I have enclosed a summary of my own analysis of the rezoning request. After reviewing the plans that have been made available on the City's website, it is clear from even a cursory understanding of the proposal that it is inappropriate to rezone this property from industrial to residential.

I strongly oppose the Trinitas proposal for 634 E. Keefe because 1) it poses serious traffic, parking, noise and other conflicts with the existing mix of duplex and single-family homes and industrial businesses; 2) it creates a dorm-like setting far from campus and without the university oversight that makes a dorm function well in an off-campus setting; 3) it conflicts with the Northeast Area Plan's goals for the Riverworks area; 4) it rezones land in a way that flouts the policies that have driven the city's best and most successful redevelopment efforts to date; and 4) accepting this plan sets a precedent, a model of development that disregards existing effective plans and policies, and demonstrates that a well thought out strategy for growth and integrated mixed use development can be trumped by easy short-term gains.

For these reasons, I ask that you not support the Trinitas proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Corey Zetts
3135 N. Dousman Street