

23 October 2017

2846 N Frederick Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211

To: Milwaukee Department of City Development
City Plan Commission
Planning Division
PlanAdmin@milwaukee.gov
Re: File 161714

As a Milwaukee homeowner with 15 years invested in the Upper East side, I am writing to ask the Milwaukee Planning Division and the City Plan Commission to recommend denying the proposed zoning change at 2900 and 2914 Oakland Avenue.

Visits to the local businesses reveals that most local tenants do their shopping and entertaining elsewhere, on North Avenue, Brady Street, Water Street, and the malls. The Oakland-Locust area would benefit from improved retail opportunities, but not at the cost of increased residential population density and architectural integrity.

The proposed development stresses residences, well beyond those zoned, and at a cost students and area residents will not easily afford. Further, this is proposed for an already beleaguered traffic intersection, in an area wrestling with year-round vacancies clearly posted, street after street.

Should the Planning Commission continue to consider violating its own approved zoning plan, there are many factors which I hope will be addressed and resolved positively in deliberations.

The City and its residents typically wish to support new business and growth, increased tax revenue, and elevate the quality of life. City Planning strives to do so in a manner that will increase the desirability of its neighborhoods for shopping, working, and living. This building fails at all this.

As expressed at open meetings, many area residents feel the proposed design will blight the area. The industrial design, lack of balconies, four-five stories on a two-lane street, all should be banned on the Upper East-side, a neighborhood valued for its charming Victorian, Victorian-Federal, and colonial architecture.

The proposed position of the building on the property, its height two stories above anything in view, its prison-block architecture, lack of balconies, loss of open space, more than double the zoned occupancy, and lack of green space, will all downgrade rather than uplift the immediate area. Other buildings in the neighborhood with this size footprint respect the curb and front-yard approach of the neighborhood; this development should at a minimum be held to that standard:



The corner hosts a busy bus stop, actively in use from early morning to the wee hours. There are accidents at this corner several times each year. The proposed design will reduce visibility, increase the vehicle and pedestrian traffic, and escalate the risk here.

Note that much of the pedestrian traffic includes students on break from University High School one block away, and parents taking their children to the Riverside Park play area, one block away. These populations need extra protection, not increased risk.

Covering the vital access next to the alley mouth yet increasing the traffic in that alley by 60 cars a day, blocking site lines, leaving no place to move accumulated snow and ice, will all combine to increase both vehicular and pedestrian accidents in this location.

Pictures are powerful tools, and perspective a powerful device. For example, in the developer's picture (below), the 5-story proposed development appears shorter than the 3-story building on the opposite corner. Standing on the corner even now, it is clear this perspective is artistic license, not reality. The sky would be occluded from the corner, and from up Locust, towering over the trees, which other buildings on the street do not.



- LOCUST INTERSECTION LOOKING NORTHEAST

The developer's rendering is drawn with beautiful blue skies. Consider how the proposed industrial design will look in the light on an overcast day, as the developer's 'current views' are shown.



Even newly-painted, its unattractive and out of place in a Victorian-era residential area..

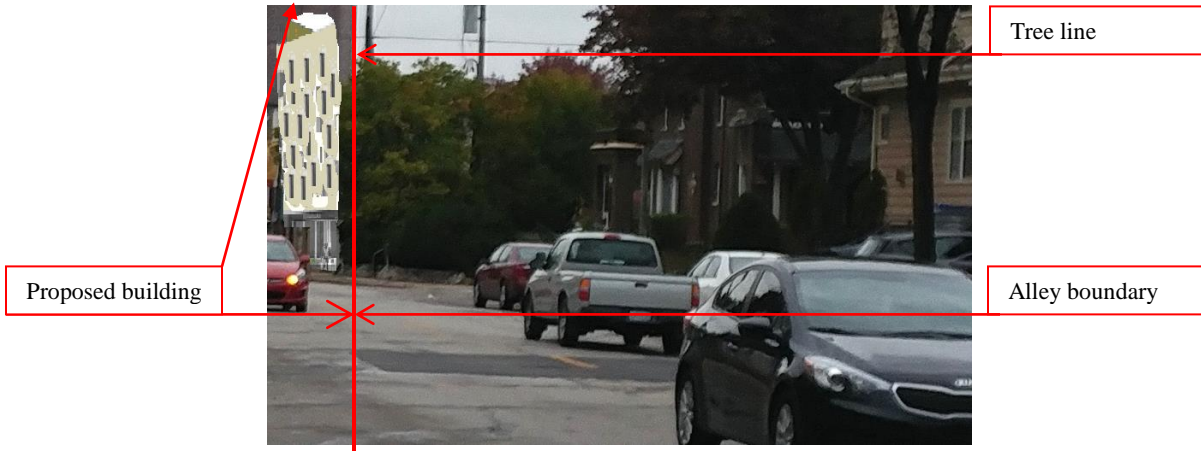
Drivers wanting to 'window shop' will risk accidents at the intersection. Why do it this way, when if approved, the building could be located up the property, leaving parking, visibility, and pedestrian access at the intersection?

Locust Avenue is a tight 2-lane street with difficult turns. Adding approximately 100 cars, plus retail traffic on this corner, with access only from the 2-lane Locust, and cutting the alley access down to 1-1/2 car widths, is irresponsible and dangerous. The wide-open space in the developer photo will be gone;





Experience shows that one exception to a set of rules typically leads to more, until the exceptions become the rules. Were this exception, 55 units and 90+ cars crowding an intersection already traffic-and-pedestrian stressed, on a main artery from the highway to the lakefront, allowed, others will follow, destroying the charm and friendly feel of the area.



Experience of this area also shows that the proposed 55 units and developer estimate of (18x5) 90 tenants, at a cost of over \$1,000 per unit, will become about 180 tenants in fact. In the area around Locust and Oakland, properties at this price level are routinely over-populated on this scale.

That is, actual occupancy for a 3 bedroom is frequently 5 tenants, two-bedrooms house 3-4 tenants, and studios struggle with 2 tenants. These tenants have vehicles, including bicycles (for which no storage is visible.) These tenants also often have guests and parties, for whom parking is not provided.

The bus stop on the corner is missing in these drawings. People waiting are vulnerable in case of accidents at this corner, and impede foot traffic. This is not a trivial consideration - there are still wood boards on the windows here, from a crash a few weeks ago.



Had the proposed development been there instead of the modest Cousin's building, anyone waiting for the bus would have had no where to escape to, and a foundation pillar would have been comprised, potentially affecting all the units above it.

Across Locust facing the location sits a storefront that changes occupants regularly. The two-story mixed-used commercial-residential building is common for the area. However, the rents in these units are lower than off the main street, not higher as the proposed development would be. Residents of these units frequently report finding "something quieter" at the first opportunity.



This corner can not easily support a 5-story high-density mixed-use out-of-plan apartment building on the street, with vacancies in the residential and commercial sections. That is why the Planning Commission zoned as it did.

Also at this intersection, during lunchtimes and from about 2:30 to about 4pm on school days, the Oakland-Locust area becomes clogged with buses and cars for Riverside High School. Traffic narrows to 1/2 lane going East due to double-parking and jockeying for

position. Going West, cars sit in the alley behind cousins for a couple of traffic light cycles, hoping for an opportunity to enter traffic around pedestrians and cars.

At other times, traffic even on Oakland is already heavy and dangerous. In the developer's own photo, a car is too-far forward waiting to turn left, presenting additional risk to any oncoming traffic. There is no left turn arrow for that white car, it just has to wait for the yellow. 60 to 90 more cars accessing the 2-lane street around the corner will not improve this situation.



ND LOOKING SOUTHEAST

Consider the current alley. Access onto Locust works only because the back of the current property is undeveloped; cars use it to allow others to pass, trucks have access. This alley is a common cause of traffic back-ups now. Without that extra pavement, even one-way traffic will be challenged, which will increase crashes and create longer delays, permanently. Locust going West already backs up 2-3 blocks waiting for the light, without either left turn lane or signal.



VIEW DOWN ALLEY LOOKING NORTH

The proposed building cuts off life-saving traffic preview dictated by ergonomics best practices. Emergency vehicles coming down the street will be invisible until cars are crossing the intersection. The design and materials of the proposed building would create an echo effect as well, obscuring the source and direction of the emergency vehicles. As this area is heavily populated and used by university students, i.e. less experienced drivers, the need for such preview is especially critical in this location.

The Alderman has compared his vision for this corner to North Avenue. However, Locust Avenue does not have the street footage for lanes that North Avenue offers. It does not have the parking options that North Avenue offers. It does not have the extra pedestrian curb that North Avenue adds to its sidewalks. Locust has a high school with heavy busing one block up the street, which North Avenue does not.

Enough North Avenue properties are built off the sidewalk, allowing good visibility, that traffic is not severely impacted. The area opens directly onto the no-parking bridge, which the Locust location does not. This development would compromise access for all the surrounding blocks, which have been artfully obscured from view in these renderings.

The conceptual artist had to pull the perspective back and down some distance to allow sky in the rendering. People standing on the corners will be unable to see that. Views of the sky will be blocked for every house facing Oakland, especially those on Bartlett and Cramer. The City should not change the zoning at the expense of these established property owners.

There is no housing shortage in the Upper East side. Enrollment at the colleges has been declining for years, vacancy signs persist, which has been the case even when enrollment peaked. The cost of housing in the area forces many students to live elsewhere and bus in. This development will exacerbate rather than ease that situation.

The Upper East side is known for livability, charm, and beauty. This industrial-design building detract from the area's charm, and this population density will compromise the area's livability. It will challenge an already beleaguered traffic intersection, stress already overcrowded street parking, and detract from the beauty residents seek here. This violates the architectural integrity of the neighborhood, the Zoning and Plan, and is over-balanced in scale and size for the area.

Other newer buildings, along North Avenue, along the River, farther along Locust. are built back from the street, with green space at the sidewalk and in front of the buildings, to make the area more pedestrian-friendly, and possibly to have a place to put the snow that will have to be cleared in winter. In fact, looking at the view along Locust, the area will be very treacherous in winter, with potential for any pedestrians to slip into the street on icy days, and barely room for two wheelchairs to pass.

The Upper East side is a neighborhood of predominantly wood houses from the early 1900s. The proposed design resembles a modern prison or low-income housing project, without balconies, brickwork patterns, or breeze-welcoming windows. Rather than 'update' the neighborhood, this design will stick out as an eyesore, compromising the integrity of the charm of the area.

Please say NO to the increased population density, NO to the institutional design, NO to blocking the vital access to the alley (which even without this added stressor justifies at least three full lanes for the existing use), and NO to further stressing the heavy traffic on Locust.

If the board and developer forces this on the area over residents' objections, at least require the developer put the parking on the corner and pull the building farther in, bring access off of Oakland, not Locust, to reduce the risk to pedestrians and vehicles alike at this intersection. Take a walk around Locust and Oakland this week, please see if you would want this development as proposed if you lived here, as I do.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Regards,
R. Simkin
2846 N Frederick Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211