

MICHAEL S. D'AMATO
ALDERMAN, 3RD DISTRICT

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Dear Neighbor:

The Hillel House has been our neighbor on the 3000 block of North Stowell Avenue for the past 30 years. This institution has faithfully served students of the Jewish faith who attend UWM for many years in a way that has never disturbed those of us who live nearby. I write to you to clarify some misinformation that has been spread regarding Hillel's search for a new home.

Unfortunately, I have not been as diligent as I should have been in providing information to near neighbors about this project. I apologize for my oversight but hope that my shortcomings don't reflect negatively on a project that is in the best interest of the neighborhood, Jewish students attending UWM and the East Side as a whole.

As you may know, Hillel has outgrown its present space at 3035 N. Stowell and last year began looking for real estate near UWM to find a location for a new Hillel center. Hillel and the Milwaukee Jewish Federation (MJF), their parent organization, purchased two single-family homes on the 2000 block of E. Kenwood that they planned to demolish in order to build their new facility. Because Hillel is a religious institution they do not require a zoning change or variance and would be permitted to build at the Kenwood site.

When area neighbors and I learned of Hillel's planned demolition of these properties, we immediately let the MJF know of our opposition and began proceedings to protect these homes by declaring the properties historic. The last thing we need in our neighborhood is the loss of high quality single-family homes. This spring, with the cooperation of the MJF and the strong advocacy of the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association, I was successful in securing historic designation of all the homes on the 2000 block of E. Kenwood. Several of Hillel's direct neighbors were very vocal in support of preserving the Kenwood homes.

Despite our success, we were still left with the issue of finding a new home for our old neighbor, Hillel. It made little sense for the neighborhood and the city to just sit back and say "no" to an institution that has served our community well over the years and to engage in a long legal battle that would be of no benefit to our great neighborhood. As part of our discussions with Murray Hill and the MJF we pledged our best effort to help Hillel find a suitable location. Again, several direct neighbors were among those who pledged their best effort to find a suitable new home for Hillel, including support for expansion of their present facility at 3035 N. Stowell.



Over the next several months we passed on several suggested locations that we hoped might work. In addition, the MJF explored the idea of expanding the existing Hillel house in order to meet their needs as was suggested by their direct neighbor. It was ultimately determined that such an expansion was neither cost effective nor met the programming needs of Hillel.

The one proposed location that was suggested by several neighbors and seemed to be worth exploring was the possibility of building a new Hillel on a portion of the existing parking lot behind the Zelazo Center. This location provided a site that did not require the demolition of any homes, it allowed Hillel to remain close to UWM and on the 3000 block of N. Stowell and possibly provide an attractive structure designed by excellent architects (La/Dallman) where an unsightly surface parking lot presently exists.

In order to explore the possibility of a new Hillel on the Zelazo site I began to meet with officials from UWM, the MJF, Mayor Barrett's office and the Department of City Development. In addition, I attended monthly meetings of the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association to update them on the progress. I also informed the immediately adjacent neighbor to both the existing and the proposed new Hillel facility to let them know of these discussions and arranged for MJF officials and their architects to meet with these neighbors who would clearly be the most affected by this change. Hillel staff was directed to contact neighbors in the area to extend an invitation to informational meetings regarding Hillel and the proposed new facility. While those meetings did take place, they were not well attended and proper notice was not given to all neighbors on the 3000 blocks of N. Stowell and N. Prospect. As your alderman and neighbor I should have issued that notice from my office. I take full responsibility for the poor effort.

The approval to sell the land to MJF to build a new Hillel facility on the Zelazo lot required the approval of both the UW Board of Regents and the State Building Commission. Both of those approvals have been secured. From the city's perspective, no special zoning permission is required as Hillel is a religious organization and a permitted use. However, in order to accommodate the project and provide for maximum efficiency of the remaining parking lot, the city has agreed to adjust the alley between the 3000 blocks of Stowell/Prospect from an "L" alley to a "T" alley. This returns the alley to its previous configuration while also preserving the one-way northbound condition. This change is being made at no expense to the neighbors or the city and will not require any work to be done on the portion of the alley adjacent to our homes. I have also asked that the MJF consider limiting the sale of the existing Hillel house, which will return to the tax rolls, to owner-occupants so it may help stabilize our neighborhood.

The MJF plans to build a new Hillel house in the parking lot facing Stowell Avenue. The facility will be approximately 5000 square feet and will not exceed the height of the homes on the block. The building will respect all required setbacks unless there is a preference from neighbors that those setbacks be changed in some way. Parking will be provided on site for Hillel staff.

Going forward, I have asked that MJF representatives meet with neighbors as soon as they have preliminary designs of the new facility in order to provide information and gain feedback. So as not to repeat my previous mistake, I will mail a notice to you to invite you to that and any subsequent meetings.

I support a new Hillel house being built at the Zelazo parking lot as both the Alderman of the area and as a neighbor (My family and I live at 3007 N. Stowell Avenue). I think that this solution to a neighborhood problem not only preserves our existing housing stock, but it also allows an important institution to continue their work with students who respect us and our neighborhood.

I have met personally with a number of neighbors who have had questions regarding this issue. I would be happy to meet with you or answer any questions you may have. I can be reached at 286-3447 at City Hall or by e-mail at mdamat@milwaukee.gov. You may also call me anytime at 708-9123 or stop by my home.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. S. D'Amato". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "M." and last name "D'Amato" clearly visible.

Michael S. D'Amato
Alderman, 3rd District