



November 13, 2024

Zoning and Neighborhood Development Committee  
Milwaukee City Hall  
200 E. Wells St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

RE: Menomonee Valley Partners and BID 26 Resolution Regarding the Rezoning Request for St. Paul Avenue

Honorable members of the Zoning and Neighborhood Development Committee,

It is evident that the City is weighing the continuation of the conditions caused by the blighted property at 324 N. 15th Street versus the impact of rezoning on nearby properties. Based on the reasons presented in this letter, the Menomonee Valley Partners Board and BID 26 BIDs resolve that, if this property is to be rezoned by the Council, it is important that the Council not create a precedent to undo what is arguably the city's most successful plan. Instead, it is critical that the Council - and other public bodies, including CPC and RACM - draw the distinction between this property and other historic or vacant properties in the Valley as follows:

- The rezoning request for 324 N. 15th Street should be the only exception made to allow a use that is specifically prohibited by the Valley 2.0 Plan without undertaking a proper community engagement process. To rezone this property without taking these steps is irresponsible and risks adverse impacts on one of the most successful areas in the city.
- No taxpayer funds will be used to support a deviation from the Valley 2.0 Plan. If the aforementioned building is developed as residential, it will be done without any City or other public subsidy.
- The building at 324 N. 15th Street is the only existing building in the Valley that is locally designated historic and has been vacant for 40+ years, and is therefore a unique circumstance.
- The proposed owner/developer has committed to seeking commercial, non-residential uses as he undertakes the long process of saving the building on this property, and to move forward with residential conversion only if unable to secure an office/commercial by the time of interior buildout.
- If the building is redeveloped as residential, all lease agreements for apartments shall include a disclosure that both the property owner and prospective tenants are aware that there are active industrial uses in the area, including the following:
  - truck loading docks that block the street periodically;
  - active manufacturing with noise, vibrations, and operations throughout the day and night;
  - three of the region's largest tourist destinations that will bring periodic traffic, outdoor concerts, and other events;

- the City is aware that any complaints about existing uses in the area are a hardship caused by the development of the property for residential use. Existing Valley businesses shall not be penalized by the City for their continued operations if the City allows rezoning.

MVP and the BID support the Valley 2.0 Plan, part of the City of Milwaukee Comprehensive Plan developed through the input of hundreds of stakeholders in and around the Valley, and the plan's policy recommendations. By all accounts, the planning for the Valley has led to great success for Milwaukee, including the attraction and expansion of over 70 companies bringing more than 5,500 jobs; the region's largest tourist destinations bringing millions of annual visitors, and 60 acres of parks and trails, including Three Bridges Park and the Hank Aaron State Trail, the St. Paul Avenue's burgeoning design district in restored buildings, etc. The Valley has become not only a Milwaukee success story but a national model of sustainable economic development and environmental restoration.

We recognize that the issue leading to the rezoning request is not a community request for housing in the Valley; in fact, neighborhoods surrounding the Valley are actively developing housing that builds off their residential amenities (transit, schools, and existing housing stock). The issue leading to the rezoning request is a single building whose owners have allowed it to sit vacant for 40 years and become a nuisance to all those around it. The rezoning is a way to create a cost-effective way to address neglectful property ownership, which could occur at the expense of the long-term industrial businesses nearby.

MVP and the BID understand that nearby property owners and businesses on St. Paul Avenue have been negatively impacted by the nuisance issues created by this property and recognizes their support for a solution to the problems of this building. We agree with them that since the current ownership has done nothing in the last 40 years to bring improvement to this steadily deteriorating property, the prospective owner/developer Mr. Breuning is the best hope for saving the building and restoring it to productive use. Nearby property owners and businesses have varying opinions on the best decision regarding 324 N. 15th Street, depending on the industry and their longevity in the area, as evidenced by the public record of businesses that have written to the file or attended City Plan Commission meetings to oppose or support this request, and from organizations throughout the city who have weighed in to caution on the policy ramifications if a decision is made to prioritize saving a willfully neglected building at the expense of companies that provide good jobs in the city.

We further understand the challenge that the prospective owner/developer faces in securing an office/commercial tenant this far out from occupancy (estimated to be three years from closing due to the amount of work this property requires) and in the current market. Mr. Breuning has told MVP that he will continue to work with us to find commercial tenant(s), which will be more likely once the building is within a year of readiness for occupancy, but says that he cannot close on the property without a backup plan. MVP is committed to continuing to work to find commercial tenants for the building if Mr. Breuning purchases it. He has assured us that, if he closes on the property, he can complete much of the structural stabilization, the historic tax credit process, and other work that can be done regardless of zoning and use, while working in good faith to find commercial tenants.



The MVP and BID Boards of Directors believe that the Menomonee River Valley should continue its role in the City of Milwaukee as a commercial/industrial/entertainment district supporting good jobs accessible to the residents of the surrounding residential neighborhoods and affirms the recommendations contained in Valley 2.0 Plan, which have guided the Valley's successful revitalization as part of the larger Milwaukee vision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corey Zetts".

Corey Zetts  
Executive Director  
Menomonee Valley Partners and Business Improvement District #26