

Summary and Action Requested

I live at 2624 E. Belleview Place, and have for the last 16 years. I have a lovely stucco arts-and-crafts style home built in 1912. Business commitments prohibit me from attending in person the April 23 meeting with the City Planning Commission and the Historic Preservation Commission to review the proposed Downer Avenue development plan. As a resident of the North Point Historic District, one of the city's best-preserved early twentieth century neighborhoods, and a neighbor of the city-owned lot recommended for sale to New Land Enterprises and subsequent demolition and "development", I want to express my deep objections to both the sale of the land and the development plan currently proposed.

I urge you to halt the sale of this historic city property to the developer.

If this is not possible, influence him or any other developer to make any new construction blend seamlessly into these historic surroundings, meet the needs for safety for immediate neighbors, and respect our need for light and a minimum of air, noise, and light pollution.

Perspective

I am in complete agreement with the National Trust view that:

"Historic sites such as the Downer Avenue Commercial District and the North Point Historic District play an important role in the understanding of our collective history, and can enrich our appreciation of historic neighborhoods. We are concerned that the 5-story parking garage proposed for the City of Milwaukee property at 2574-90 North Downer Avenue will have an adverse impact on both of these historic districts. The design and materials of the proposed development are entirely inappropriate for a historic district and its size is vastly out of scale for the pedestrian-friendly commercial area and residential neighborhoods on which it will intrude.

"Simply put, a 5-story parking garage is not the right use for this site. The Downer Avenue Historic Commercial District, mostly comprised of two- and three-story commercial buildings built from 1903-1936, and the small scale residential homes closest to the Downer Avenue commercial district in the nearby North Point Historic District, will be overwhelmed by this development. One of the residences will be within 3 feet of the rear of the proposed new garage and will be dwarfed by this behemoth structure, drastically reducing its livability as sunlight is blocked and window views obscured."

I'd like to take this opportunity to express my objections to both the plan and the process, in my own words.

First, objections to the parking structure plan itself:

- The structure gets larger and larger, and uglier and uglier, from one plan version to the next. The design and the materials are grossly incompatible with this historic district.
- The current green buffer space, including a magnificent tree, and the surface parking lot serve a real purpose and function: they provide an "invitation" from the neighborhood to the commercial area. The proposed plan violates principles of good urban planning with regard to open and green spaces. It will also remove the historic popcorn wagon on the corner.

- Out of scale vis-à-vis the homes and commercial buildings in the neighborhood, generally 2-3 stories. There will be severe effects to the Belleview Place neighbors in blocking light and views.
- I am very concerned about the proximity of the structure to the 2623 E. Belleview property line. It violates good planning principles regarding setbacks, principles which are in fact being observed where it is convenient for this developer (in the proposed development on Downer and Park, where there will be a green space buffer of 10 feet). It prohibits light from entering the entire west side of the house. It is a real threat in the event of fire or rescue activity. It is a gross infringement of privacy.
- It subjects neighbors to extremes of noise, air, and light pollution – from cars entering and leaving the structure, and from the light poles of the roof of the structure.
- It violates principles of good urban zoning practice – in particular the prohibition of spot zoning.
- Local retailers will actually be hurt rather than helped by this development. Their stated needs are for filled storefronts and more customers. They benefit currently from open, visible, safe, accessible parking. The parking structure is unlikely to be used as promised, as Milwaukee consumers are more likely to visit commercial areas where they can park on the street or in open lots.
- It will likely diminish residential property values, especially mine and 2623 E. Belleview, significantly.

And my objections to the process:

- Extremely short notice for key meetings
- Constantly changing plans with failure to notify residents when they are changed
- Bundling of the City Planning Commission meeting with the Historic Preservation Commission meeting appears to be an attempt to subvert the authority and influence of the Historic Preservation Commission.
- Backdoor process that led to the General Planned Development designation
- Completely and continually ignored resident feedback – in addition to objections from hundreds of area residents, the list of organizations that have expressed objections includes the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association, the Watertower Landmark Trust group, and the Cambridge Woods Neighbors Association.
- Third District Alderman D’Amato appears to be acting in alliance with the developer, New Land Enterprises, given the lack of attention to resident and association objections
- City seems to have one criteria only, that being the money the developer plans to invest
- City is complicit in setting up a single developer as a monopoly landlord (already tenants are leaving the neighborhood in anticipation of the “development” – including the Chancery, which has been here for decades)
- No account taken of historic preservation in the planning, until now when it is extremely late in the game

I have additional objections to the larger development plan for Downer, in particular the 11-story condo which has no place in a neighborhood which was properly zoned for 5-6 stories until the backdoor process that led to the rezoning of the area to meet a single developer’s avarice, and the medical/surgery facility which has no place in a residential/commercial neighborhood.

In Closing

As a resident, I want the Downer neighborhood to thrive. I fully understand support the need for restoration of many of the buildings in the district, and the need to attract more clientele to make use of the goods and services provided by area retailers. I only hope that in this process we honor and protect the essential nature of this historic residential and commercial district, and maintain the balance of residential and commercial interests.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Sincerely,

Donna J. Neal

