

September 9, 2008
Re: Goll Mansion

Mayor Tom Barrett and Common Council
City Hall
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Mayor Barrett and Members of the Common Council:

As President of the Board of Directors of the 1522 On The Lake Condominium Association, I feel it both appropriate and timely to officially register our opposition to developer Boris Gokhman's proposed construction of a 26-story condominium tower on the site of the historic Goll mansion at 1550 N. Prospect Ave., immediately north of our building. Details of Mr. Gokhman's plan were finally filed with the City on Aug. 29, 2008. I ask that you give your considered attention to our perspective, which I will summarize in this letter, so that you might truly understand and support our contention that this proposal is fundamentally unfair to residents of our neighborhood and detrimental to the City's interests.

Our condo association represents at least 150 taxpaying voters who are owners of nearly 100 separate homes in our building, virtually all of whom would be adversely affected either directly or indirectly if this proposed tower is constructed. I am entirely confident that I speak here for the vast majority of us, as evidenced by the overwhelming vote of our owners in 2005 to begin our opposition effort and again in recent weeks in signing a formal petition to protest Mr. Gokhman's request for a zoning change to accommodate his project.

As background, I want to make clear that our building, 1522 On The Lake, which opened to its first occupants in February of 2003, was constructed by Weas Development totally within existing zoning and building codes, with no variances. It was built on a site previously occupied not by any historic structure but by a 1970s style, three-story nursing home that had been out of business and vacant for some time.

The adjacent property at 1550 N. Prospect, including the 1898 Goll mansion, was designated for the Milwaukee register of historic places in November of 2002, bestowing on it the strongest historic protections that the City offers. This decision was consistent with the City's formal public policy declaration, as stated in the historic preservation ordinance, that protection of such places of special historical value is "required in the interest of health, prosperity, safety and welfare" so as to safeguard "the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history."

That *unanimous* action by the Common Council clearly sent a strong signal of reassurance to our building's potential condo owners, none of whom had yet finalized their purchases at the time of the Council's action. They had every right and reason to trust that the City would keep its word. For the City now to waive established zoning and code requirements – to abruptly change the rules of the game specifically to accommodate Boris Gokhman's modern, high-rise condo building – would be both disingenuous and a violation of that trust.

Such action by the City would cost individual homeowners in our building tens of thousand of dollars each in lost value of their investments and sow uncertainty among other

potential investors at a time when there are growing indications of failure at some of the downtown condo developments already underway here. Rather than foster fears that zoning is merely “what eight aldermen say it is – we can change the zoning at any time,” as our alderman, Bob Bauman, recently stated publicly, everyone has a stake in Milwaukee projecting a sense of predictability in its vision for this City as a desirable place to live and invest.

We at 1522 are not opposed to development in our neighborhood or even at the site of the Goll mansion. We have given Mr. Gokhman several different ideas for projects there that could be profitable for him without desecrating the historic value of the Goll site or requiring override of the City’s historic preservation guidelines for the property. When development occurs, there should not have to be winners and losers. Everyone should win.

There is more involved in this issue, however, than historic preservation. There also is a matter of *neighborhood preservation*, which is very important to many of our homeowners, including many on the south side of our building who are not immediately adjacent to the proposed development. This neighborhood enjoys an attractive mix of structures both historic and modern, of residents both affluent and of modest means, and of the elderly as well as the young and middle-aged (the great majority of our building’s owners go off to their jobs every morning). Development is surely needed in Milwaukee, including in our neighborhood, but it should be wisely guided to appropriate sites. Constructing a wall of high-rise buildings along the east side of Prospect Ave. would surely set in motion economic forces that would drive out much of the neighborhood’s charming diversity, both human and architectural. Our concerns in this regard are shared widely among property owners and residents along Prospect Ave., as any credible survey of neighborhood sentiment would document.

The City of Milwaukee has a choice. With many thousands of condominium units currently on the market, will the City grant a permit for a building that violates historic preservation concerns? Or will the City consider development that more reasonably meets the needs of both our neighborhood and the City? We think that approval of a plan for Prospect Ave. should occur in a way that lets *everyone* win.

Sincerely,

Alan David, President

cc. Members, City Plan Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Media