

From: John Johnson <jdjohn215@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2022 12:12 PM
To: cityplancommission <cityplancommission@milwaukee.gov>
Subject: In Support of File No. 220401

Some people who received this message don't often get email from jdjohn215@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hello,

My letter in support is enclosed below. I have also attached the same as a PDF.

Thanks

[BEGIN]

Dear City Plan Commission and Zoning, Neighborhoods, and Development Committee,

I encourage you to approve the rezoning of this parcel from RM3 to RM6.

Although a member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, my interest in this matter is not only parochial. I'm also a research fellow at Marquette Law School's Lubar Center where I study housing and demographic trends in the Milwaukee area. I've become convinced that one of Milwaukee's most fundamentally pressing problems is declining population. Our city's infrastructure was built for many more people. After peaking in 1960, our population has fallen in each subsequent census. Each year, our growing costs are shouldered by fewer and fewer residents.

The size of Milwaukee's 17,600 person population loss from 2010 to 2020 caught some by surprise. After all, certain parts of the city *feel* like they are growing, and in some sense they are. All of the city's population decline is attributable to declining household sizes. The total number of occupied housing units actually increased by more than 5,000 over the decade. But the typical household size fell from 2.50 to 2.39. As I wrote [in September](#), "Imagine a block with 20 dwellings. Now, on average, 2 fewer people live on that block."

Household sizes are declining for one simple reason. Fewer people are having kids. In fact, nearly all (96%) of the city's population decline came among of children. The adult population stayed steady. At first, I suspected an increase in the number of families moving out of the city—maybe after the residency requirement ended in 2015, but it turns out the answer is even simpler.

Milwaukee's under-18 population declined by 16,900 from 2010 to 2020. Each year's cohort of newborns replaces another group of kids turning 18. From 2010 to 2019, 16,000 fewer kids were born in Milwaukee than from 1992-2001—the cohort who aged into adulthood. In other words, 95% of Milwaukee's decline in children is simply due to falling birth rates.

New housing developments like the one proposed today are critical for Milwaukee's future. We added 5,000 more *occupied* housing units during the 2010s, and that still wasn't enough to stave off population loss. Declining household sizes mean that we need to build more faster. The neighborhoods surrounding Downer Avenue are some of the most popular places to live in the city. Building more apartments like these serves two important purposes. It better matches the household sizes of an increasing share of Milwaukeeans. Equally important, these high-end apartments can attract high income childless young professionals and empty-nester retirees, thereby freeing up existing single family homes for larger households looking for room to raise a family without leaving the city.

Growing our population and tax base is the best way to improve the lives of all Milwaukeeans. What better place to start than one of the city's most popular neighborhoods. For all these reasons, I encourage you to vote yes on this proposal.

Sincerely,
John D. Johnson
Milwaukee, Wisconsin