



NEW LAND

ENTERPRISES

February 21, 2022

Alderman Jose G. Perez
Chairman, Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee
Milwaukee Common Council

Re: Files # 211608 and 211612 (Items 9 and 10 on agenda for 2/22/22 meeting)

Dear Chairman Perez:

I am writing with regard to files authorizing expenditures for Tax Incremental District No. 49 (Cathedral Place), in the 4th Aldermanic District, and Tax Incremental District No. 79 (North Water Street Riverwalk), in the 3rd Aldermanic District.

New Land Enterprises is a major stakeholder in the Van Buren Street corridor with two new projects under construction – Ascent (259 units, 7,000 SF of retail and a construction cost of over \$90 million), and Nova (corner of Van Buren and Juneau, 251 units, 2,200 SF of retail and a construction cost of over \$48 million). We applaud efforts by the city to undertake a major redesign of Van Buren Street and two other major corridors in our city to make them greener and more friendly to cyclists and pedestrians, making the area better for residents and visitors alike. In fact, we believe a re-envisioned Van Buren could be a model on how to treat streets in the future.

New Land's involvement in this effort dates back to July of 2020 when we approached the Department of Public Works to begin discussions about how the city could invest in Van Buren to spur further development on a street that has great investment potential. Our vision included a re-imagined corridor that spread from Michigan street on the south to Capitol Drive on the north as Van Buren transitioned to the neighborhoods straddling Holton Street. We've seen how TIF investment in public infrastructure has spurred development in this city many times before with successful examples in the Park East Corridor, a rebuilt Commerce Street, the Riverwalk, The Hop, The Menomonee Valley and others. When the city uses private development to invest in upgrades to our public infrastructure those investments pay off exponentially with additional private investment and, in turn, tax base to be shared for city services that benefit all Milwaukee citizens.

While we strongly urge the committee to pass these two files, we also have concerns about the level of investment in the Van Buren project. In order to spur the world-class investment needed in this corridor, we need infrastructure that is as good, but preferably better, than our peer cities. And we are currently woefully behind. Other projects the city has engaged in to accomplish a "street share" concept have been well intentioned but not well executed. Colored paint, striping and plastic won't create the environment necessary to effect the needed change. I speak from experience – using our bicycles to access the Oak Leaf trail or take our kids to Maryland Avenue Montessori via North Ave, where almost every single plastic "lane protector" has been run over by a vehicle, is far from safe and enjoyable.

With that in mind we ask that you consider these points as you deliberate:

- The schedule on these projects calls for public and stakeholder input to begin the design process. However, if the budget is set today, why ask people what they want in a public process later? And how can we claim that this is the best we can do if we limit ourselves from the start? ***I ask that you inquire as to whether additional funds could be made available in these two existing TIDs to fund a truly great project that will be a model for the nation.***
- “Milwaukee’s Green Streets and Stormwater Management Program provides street-focused stormwater strategies to improve water quality and reduce polluted stormwater runoff.” The greening of the street must be maximized with plantings and bioswales to capture rainwater and reduce heat-island effect. A truly re-envisioned street must have a robust greening and stormwater capture element included.
- Any physical barriers separating the bike lanes from cars must be sturdy and permanent. The plastic bollards that we now see on several streets are an utter failure, rendered useless soon after they are installed because of car strikes or plowing damage. A 12-yearlong study published in the Journal of Transport and Health in 2019 concluded that cities with “protected and separated bike lanes had 44 percent fewer deaths (and 50% fewer injuries) than the average city.” All cities studied (which included Kansas City and Chicago) experienced an increase in cycling as they built more infrastructure. Most importantly, “researchers found that bike infrastructure, particularly physical barriers... as opposed to shared or painted lanes, significantly lowered fatalities.” ***Permanent, sturdy barriers are essential to creating the separation needed on the street.***
- Unfortunately, our vision of widened sidewalks that allow for outdoor dining and a more pleasant pedestrian experience, is not part of the plan. We encourage the committee and departments to consider options that help attract businesses to the street by making outdoor dining areas that are substantial, safe, and attractive.
- Akin to bike lanes, intersection treatments must also be permanent and solid. We have major intersections along Van Buren at Wisconsin, Kilbourn and Brady Street, as well as major new investments at the intersections of Mason and Juneau. This area of the city, where downtown’s office/business and residential neighborhoods meet, is a highly trafficked pedestrian corridor with known speeding problems. Making intersections safer and elevating the aesthetics are key to making this a successful project. ***Wherever possible, we should be pushing curbs out around major intersections rather than creating the illusion of safety with paint and plastic.***

I thank you for your consideration of my comments. We all share the same passion – to make Milwaukee a great city. It’s imperative we work together to make improvements to both the public and private built environment that reflect the city we want to become, not the city we have been.

Sincerely,

Tim Gokhman
Managing Director