

Downer True Value Hardware
2629 North Downer Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211
332-2820

February 3, 2007

Mayor Thomas Barrett
City Hall
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202

Dear Mayor Barrett,

I own the Downer Hardware Store. My family has operated this successful business on Downer Avenue for more than 70 years.

I am very interested in revitalizing the Downer Business District. I support new development that advances the interests of the street level retail merchants and that is sensitive to the surrounding residential community.

But I am concerned that the planned unit development that is now being considered for Downer may have detrimental effects for the street level merchants. My two principal concerns are that the plan makes changes in existing zoning and that the plan involves the sale and elimination of the City owned parking lot at Downer and Belleview.

The current zoning restrictions protect the interests of both the retail business owners and the neighbors. I do not want any changes from the current zoning.

A demonstration of why the protections of the current zoning should not be relaxed is provided by the fact the proposed planned unit development contemplates not only zoning changes but also a special exception from the restrictions imposed by the current zoning. The current zoning does not allow medical facilities in the Downer Business District unless a special use exception is granted. The current zoning recognizes that medical facilities are not normally appropriate in a neighbor retail shopping area such as Downer Avenue. But the proposed planned unit development contemplates the placement of a surgery center across the street from my store.

A surgery center will change the character of this neighborhood shopping district. There are reasons why a surgery center is not normally allowed in business district that is zoned in the way that Downer Avenue is currently zoned. Those reasons are even more compelling in this situation as no parking is being provided in the building in which the surgery center will be located, even though that building currently does have parking on the entire second floor. I know that the parking area in the building is in deteriorating condition and needs to be rehabilitated. But if the building is going to be rehabilitated and at least one extra floor is going to be added, then the rehabilitation of the building ought to include the rehabilitation of the current parking that is available within the building.

In regard to parking in general, my fellow merchants on Downer have said that the lack of parking is not the reason that they are concerned about the future of business on Downer. Rather, they have said that their concern is that there is currently not enough activity on the street. They are concerned about vacant store fronts. They have not expressed a concern about a lack of parking. Parking needs for customers are satisfied by curb side street parking and the City surface parking lots at corner of Downer and Park and the corner of Downer and Bellevue. The lot at Downer and Park is underutilized at this time and is available to accommodate the needs of any upturn in business for the street level retail merchants. The lot at Downer and Bellevue is utilized to a much greater extent by all our customers.

The Downer and Bellevue lot provides open, accessible, safe, and inexpensive parking that is readily visible to our potential customers as they are driving by on Downer Avenue. That lot is critical to the business of the street level merchants on Downer. We can afford to lose it.

The proposed plan unit development would eliminate the existing street level lot and replace it with parking underground and on the upper level of a parking structure. That is not an acceptable alternative.

The parking structure that is proposed for Downer and Bellevue would not add a significant number of parking spaces to those that are currently available in the business district. In addition to all the parking space that the proposed development will eliminate from the second floor of the building housing the surgery center, that plan will also eliminate many convenient street level parking spaces that are now available for customers of the street level merchants. The plan eliminates the off street parking that is now provided in the area near the current bank drive-thru at Downer and Park. It eliminates street parking spaces on Park so that there will be a patient drop off area for the surgery center. It eliminates numerous street level parking spaces on both Downer and Bellevue to accommodate all the vehicular entrances and exits for the new structure that would be built at that corner. And, most importantly, the plan eliminates all the street level spaces in the current lot at Downer and Bellevue.

But my concern is less about the number of parking spaces than it is about the convenience of the available parking. All the parking spaces that would be available in the structure proposed for Downer and Bellevue would be less convenient than the parking that is now available to our customers. Our customers are now not deterred by having to carry the equipment and other items that they purchase from our store to street level parking that is now available in the two City lots or curb side street parking on Downer and nearby streets. But those customers will be less inclined to buy equipment from us if they have to carry it into basement or upper level parking.

An additional problem with the proposed sale of the City lot at Downer and Bellevue is that the sale will increase the monopoly position of the dominant landlord. About one year ago, the merchant community was decrying the problem of having a single landlord control so much of the district. The proposed sale of the City property at Downer and Bellevue will only make the situation worse than it was one year ago. Even now, there are tenants of the dominant landlord

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who are afraid to voice opposition to some aspects of the planned unit development for fear of retaliation.

Please do not sell the City surface level parking lot at Downer and Belleview. The Downer Business District needs that surface level parking for our customers. Our nearby competitors, such as the Oakland Avenue Business District in Shorewood, have abundant open, accessible, and safe surface level parking spaces available for their customers in numerous surface level lots adjacent to their businesses. We should not be put at a competitive disadvantage by offering our customers only inconvenient parking in a basement or on the upper levels of a structure.

And, please do not make any zoning changes or grant any special use exceptions in the Downer Business District or in the surrounding residential community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dale Borneman", written over a horizontal line.

Dale Borneman
Owner
Downer Hardware