

Mayor Tom Barrett
City of Milwaukee
City Hall
200 E. Wells St., Room 201
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Re: 1550 N. Prospect Ave.

Dear Mayor Barrett:

I am writing to you -- and by way of copies of this letter, to other relevant officials and committee members and staff -- to express my dismay at the reported plans to put up a monumental high rise building behind the Goll House Mansion on Prospect Avenue. I live next door, at the 1522 On The Lake Condominiums, and therefore have a very personal interest in what happens on the property to the north.

Good property developments improve neighborhoods and increase everyone's property values. The proposed development does the opposite: property values in the neighborhood will almost certainly decline if the proposed building is built as described in the newspaper and in the notice letter sent to residents of the area by the City Clerk's office. For certain, the proposed plan would severely impact the property values of the 90 or so home owners in my building (and thus, incidentally, lower the tax basis the City can rely on for our property), while creating such construction-related risks as noise and air pollution, traffic problems associated with construction, and possible soil subsidence along a bluff that by its nature is less stable than flat ground. Most importantly, the current proposal, which contemplates shoehorning a huge building between the Goll Mansion and the bike path and nature trail behind and below the property, would have a deleterious long-term impact on the neighborhood as a whole, inevitably changing for the worse the character of the block, the traffic and parking patterns on the street, and the parkland to the east.

As reported, the plans are to move the Goll House forward on its lot, so that it rests (assuming it survives the process) some 30 feet closer to the sidewalk than it currently does. The developer would then construct a massive 26-story building, with 202 apartments, behind the relocated mansion. The Goll House would thus be converted to something like a brownstone and be dwarfed by the huge apartment tower behind it, making the Mansion like a bunion on the foot of the much larger structure.

The new building would have five or six above-ground stories of parking, in effect creating the first parking ramp on Prospect Avenue in this area (all other recent buildings have been designed with below-ground parking). It would fill up the space, currently used for ground level parking, behind the relocated Goll House, extending north and south on the sides to within three feet of the property lines of its neighbors (unlike most of the new buildings on the street in the past two decades, which have designed ample "breathing spaces" between neighbors, allowing for light and views to abide), and would reach to the furthest boundary line to the east, toward the lake, (also unlike virtually all of its neighbors who have not built out to the edge of the bluff), blocking sight lines all along the street.

The proposed development would inevitably create long-term traffic and parking problems on Prospect. Unless the owners plan to rent virtually exclusively to singles, the planned 233 indoor parking spaces for the residents will fall well short of what would be needed, and, as I understand it, only five guest parking spaces are proposed for the entire building. As it is, many of the people living on Prospect Avenue, who reside in older buildings that do not have attached parking, struggle to find parking on the street. Imagine adding to their problem the competition from visitors and residents of this proposed, high density high rise. The building could conceivably be home to upwards of 300 or more residents. Imagine the effect on traffic on Prospect of all the cars setting out in the morning or coming home at night. And imagine how you would feel if a 26-story, 202-unit apartment building were constructed within three feet of the property line of your own property.

When a plan to construct a high-rise on the Goll House property was first presented to the City in 2005-06, the proposal was for 35 residential units. In a letter to the Zoning Committee of the Common Council expressing support for the project, Rocky Marcoux referred to the planned building as "slender." The present proposed development, which contemplates nearly six times as many units on a significantly larger footprint, can hardly be said to be slender. Enormous, maybe. Monumental, perhaps. "Hulking" might come to mind. But slender, no.

Moreover, the problem is not only the heft of the place or the number of proposed rental units. As planned, the building will be sited at the easternmost limits of the property, at the edge of the bluff. A looming high-rise built smack dab on the rear property line of the Goll House site will adversely affect the bike path below. People who use the path like to feel they are in a park, not like they are taking a tour of Wall Street, with buildings towering above and blocking the sun. If the rear-property setbacks are ignored, the ultimate result will be that future developments will follow the same press to the east, in order to compete with the vista-hogging Goll House tower, and the bike path will eventually become like the bottom of a culvert, with retaining walls of the parking structures and buildings above replacing the natural growth that exists there now.

The Historic Designation Study Report, which was prepared by the Department of City Development in conjunction with the approval of historic preservation status for the Goll House in 2002, termed the Mansion a "one-of-a kind, irreplaceable structure that has been an architectural focal point of its neighborhood for more than a century." It is a "textbook of architecture," and its "scholarly design links America with the culture and building traditions of the Old World." (Report, p. 7). "[T]he enduring value of this building to the community," the Report stated, "emphasizes the need for its continued preservation." (*Id.*). The Report went on to declare that any new construction on the property "must respect the historic siting of the house," must "be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the house from the street as a free-standing structure," must have a building height and bulk which is "compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the house," and must create a roof profile which "express[es] the same continuity established by the historic building." (Report, p. 16).

Could one imagine any structure *less* respectful of the historic siting of the Goll House, *less* compatible with the height and bulk of that building, *more* discontinuous with the design of the original building, than a massive, multi-story high-rise towering above a Goll Mansion which has been literally and figuratively pushed to the curb? Reportedly, the current owners of the Goll Mansion must seek a revised planned

development district (PDD) plan for the site. By law, a planned development district is appropriate only where it encourages development which is "compatible with its surroundings." (Sect. 295-907.1, Milw. Zoning Code). In this instance, the opposite would be true.

We hear much about the tax base, and certainly that is a major consideration for the city. But unlike ten years ago, virtually every month now there are reports and visible signs of new multi-unit housing projects going up in the downtown area of Milwaukee. Likewise, a number of major office buildings are either under construction or in the planning stages. All of these will eventually strengthen the tax base. That being said, isn't it time to start thinking about the character of the neighborhoods, making them "livable" and retaining their virtues so that a reverse migration doesn't occur ten years from now?

There is obviously a market for rental housing in the downtown area, and so long as there is, there will be developers who will build new buildings there and thereby add to the City's tax rolls. But the property at 1550 N. Prospect, though a desirable site, is not the only space left. If there is a continuing market for high rise apartment buildings downtown, they will be built, whether by the Madison-based LLC that purchased the Goll Mansion property or by some other developer, and this is true regardless of what happens to the property at 1550 N. Prospect.

In the meantime, I hope that the city will not undermine the very mixed-style housing and green space character of Prospect Avenue which brought people back to the area to begin with and which contributes to the existing property values in the area. In short, I hope that the decision-makers bear in mind the very civic values inherent in historic preservation and fairness of zoning regulations and remember that market forces will take care of supplying new housing in the downtown area without the need to do violence to those values. Approving such dramatic changes to the Goll House site as are being proposed would be a mistake, and an unnecessary one at that.

Very truly yours,



Christopher T. Kolb
1522 N. Prospect Ave., #505
Milwaukee, WI 53202

cc: Historic Preservation Commission
Ald. Robert Bauman
Ald. Nik Kovac
Dept. of City Development
Office of the City Clerk