



SIGHT FIGHT

A rendering of the proposed high rise (center) and its unhappy neighbor (left).

Thy Neighbor's View

A gorgeous new high-rise could change the skyline for neighbors. What's best for the city – and its citizens? **by Bruce Murphy**

You might call it a suburbanite's nightmare.

Five years ago, attorney Patrick Dunphy moved from Brookfield to the wicked city, lured by the siren song of a high-rise condominium with a lovely lake view. Dunphy bought his condo in the 19-story, 1522 On the Lake building on Prospect Avenue, and quickly found he loved the city.

Many of the new condos rising in Milwaukee are attracting suburbanites who encounter a Downtown that's a vibrant, low-crime area packed with bars, restaurants, new retail, arts and entertainment. But all this urbanity inevitably attracts more development. Sure enough, Dunphy soon discovered a new 26-story building could be built next door and steal some of the view.

Now, when suburban friends ask about moving to the city, Dunphy says, "I tell them, 'Don't do it. You'll get screwed like I did.'"

The man Dunphy feels is screwing him is Boris Gokhman, the personification of urban street smarts. The Russian immigrant came here with nothing and has risen to become one of the city's premier developers. City officials love all the buildings and new property tax base he's created.

But with his still-thick accent and combative style, he is forever trailed by suspicion and controversy. "Gokhman attracts a lot of attention," says Ald. Robert Bauman, whose Downtown district includes much of Prospect Avenue.

The lot where Gokhman wants to build includes the Goll Mansion, designated a City of Milwaukee Historic Site. It was built in 1898 by Ferry & Clas, the company that created such landmarks as the Downtown library and St. John cathedral.

Neighbors like Dunphy assumed the site was protected. "I was advised [by his Realtor] this meant less chance of it being developed," he says.

But Prospect Avenue mansions have been getting displaced by high-rises since the 1920s. "This is where a high-rise belongs, if anywhere," says Bauman.

Gokhman has at least proposed to save the Goll Mansion, spending \$1 million to renovate it, creating an entranceway and concierge with guest bedrooms that would connect to a 26-story high-rise behind it. He has hired H. Russell Zimmerman, the foremost expert on Milwaukee mansions, to oversee the renovation.

To accomplish this, Gokhman is requesting a zoning variance in the building's setbacks and the so-called "wedding cake" construction, opting instead for a thinner but slightly higher building than

might be allowed. The idea is to create a boutique high-rise with just 35 units – far less than the 186 units that zoning rules allow. It's a sleek building that would fit well on Prospect Avenue.

Dunphy says he will lose one-third of his lake view. Gokhman estimates that 1522 residents, on average, will lose 11 percent of their total view.

Dunphy says he'd rather see the Goll Mansion torn down and the high-rise built near the sidewalk rather than have it set back further than its neighbors. Gokhman notes this would block the views looking north for residents of 1522.

Dunphy says the development is being fast-tracked and opponents ignored. But with elite owners like himself and David Behrendt, the retired editorial page editor for the old *Milwaukee Journal*, 1522's residents have had no trouble making their views known.

"There's been discussion of this for three years," says Bauman. "I'm well aware of the position of the people in 1522."

Mayor Tom Barrett has also promised a thorough review. "The mayor wants an open process. He want all sides to be heard from," says Pat Curley, Barrett's chief of staff.

But the reality is the city needs a larger property tax base, and Gokhman is proposing a \$60 million building with no tax subsidy. The Common Council will leap to approve this, says Bauman. Gokhman, he adds, could have proposed destroying the Goll Mansion, and the Council would probably vote 13-2 to approve it.

It was Bauman who helped push Gokhman to preserve the mansion. And the concept Gokhman hit on uses the marketplace to save a place that had no hope of ever getting renovated.

Yes, the new development could lower the value of some condos at 1522. But didn't 1522 affect the views of its neighbors? Ultimately, the value of all the buildings on Prospect Avenue – including 1522 – will rise together as ever more elite residences and spinoff retail is attracted to the area.

The very closeness of buildings – the density of neighborhoods – is what increases their value and excitement. It's the antithesis of the low-rise suburban environment, which is about separation of homes, yards and views.

In New York and Chicago, views of the city are just as expensive as views of the water. After sundown, the bright lights of the skyline thrill us, but the water is simply a stretch of darkness, a blank canvas bereft of people with no story to tell. A great city wants as many stories as possible. ■