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City Plan Commission
City of Milwaukee

Re: Ordinance File 220401, Part of 2604-2644 N Hackett Ave
Requested change in zoning from RM3 to RM6 by DeMichele Company

I am a 30+ year Milwaukee resident and next-door neighbor to St. Mark's Church. I am writing to express my objection to the proposed radical zoning change from RM3 to RM6.

- ***RM6 represents a complete transformation of the block (a tiny one-way street) and the neighborhood, and as such fails to meet the requirements of the long-term strategic plan.***
- ***It also presents a number of traffic, safety, and parking concerns, none of which have been adequately addressed by the developer or the City.***

There was reasonably strong community outreach on issues related to the HPC decision. I am not aware of any meaningful community outreach on issues related to the zoning change and the rationale for the specific change to RM6.

I support the HPC decision to approve the demolition and reconstruction of the parish hall, and the construction of an apartment building on the rest of the lot. The design is thoughtful, the materials are for the most part well chosen, and it is clear the HPC guidelines were carefully considered. That seems not to be the case regarding the zoning and proposed density change. Was there any thought or attention to a building that would represent significantly less impact to the neighborhood – one that could exist with an RM4 or RM5 change? What about the precedent set by a zoning change to RM6 in the middle of a residential neighborhood?

So far, the only answer I have heard to the question “Why so big? Why this density?” is that it needs to be this big to make the economics work for the developer. What exactly does this mean? What is the evidence? Where is the transparency? Is that the correct single criterion?

- RM4 would allow 25 units, or double the current allowed density under RM3. While I can guess the objections from the developer, it would be useful to know that this option was considered and why it was rejected.
- RM5 would triple the current allowed density and allow 37 units. It would also potentially allow for a reduction in building mass or height and maintain more of the

residential character of the neighborhood. It would also provide for a meaningful increase in foot traffic to local businesses and presumably a fair return to the developer.

RM6 is the second-highest zoning for multi-family residences, which seems excessive in this residential neighborhood, especially when juxtaposed against the single-family residences which will be its neighbors to the east. The height would dwarf the medium density condominiums across the street as well as the single family homes on Summit.

Comments on Staff Report:

“The development proposed for this site, designed within the limits of the RM6 zoning and the applicable historic district restrictions, would create an appropriate scale and use transition between adjacent areas consistent with this recommendation from the Plan.” Even noting that appropriateness might be in the eye of the beholder, I would ask how the tallest and most dense building in the neighborhood, situated next to a street of single family homes, provides any kind of appropriate scale and use transition consistent with the Plan. How is this “appropriate” from a Summit Avenue perspective?

“... preserve traditional neighborhood use patterns and update to fit changes in households, markets, lifestyles, etc.” -- “The use, scale and massing allowed by the RM6 zoning district is common for multifamily buildings in the area” is correct to a point. However, all the large apartment buildings referenced in the developer’s presentation and the staff report are located on two-way main streets with ample parking on both sides, and typically bike lanes or room for them. That is not the case on the 2600 block of Hackett.

Traffic concerns: We will be creating a situation where many more cars are likely to be circling the block looking for parking spaces, with many more cars making a right turn from Belleview to Hackett. It’s a difficult sharp turn in a heavily pedestrian area. An accident waiting to happen in my view.

I am also concerned about the increased number of commercial vehicles on the street – garbage and recycling, delivery, maintenance and repair – some of them large and heavy. They already block the street when visiting Café Hollander, closing off traffic for periods of time.

Café Hollander regularly has Hackett closed for bands, food trucks, concessions, etc. for various events through the year. What happens when Hackett is closed if dozens more vehicles need to get into their building? Or will Café Hollander not be allowed to have the street closed? How will this impact their business?

Safety concerns: I am primarily concerned about pedestrian safety in the crossing areas on Belleview and on the south end of Hackett. The only vehicle access to this Hackett block and thus to the proposed structure is from the South on Downer. This intersection has a “No Turn on Red” sign posted, though it is violated with some regularity. Pedestrians must be careful today even when complying with the “Walk” sign. I believe this will become more dangerous.

There is no "Walk" signal utilized for the crossing of Hackett from St Mark's to Café Hollander. That works fine right now for the most part. This crossing may become dangerous with the greater number of vehicles entering from both Downer and Belleview, on alternate turn signals. A pedestrian crossing Hackett there will have to watch out for cars coming from Downer when the north/south traffic has a green light, and for cars turning from Belleview when the east/west traffic has a green light. There will be no safe time to cross at times.

Parking: I am not so concerned about the number of spaces provided for building residents as I am apprehensive about the additional cars visiting the neighborhood and seeking parking. With respect to the "large public parking structure approximately 200" to the South": Much development has been proposed or approved based on the presence of the infamous Downer Avenue Parking Garage. Yes, there are always dozens of empty spaces available in that structure. The fact is they are rarely used. Almost no one chooses to park there, not even in a blizzard. What will make them start parking there now?

What about snow and snow plowing? Will be actually begin to enforce one-side of the street parking?

In closing

(From the complaint) "The zoning code's residential provisions are explicitly intended to "provide certainty to property owners" as to the types and intensity of uses they can expect properties on their block and in their neighborhood to be put. Milwaukee Code of Ordinances S 295-501."

Under this provision of the zoning code, one might argue against any zoning code change. I believe the intent is to force meaningful consideration of any zoning change, and deep consideration of any radical zoning change such as this. There has not yet been displayed a justification for the proposed zoning change, nor fair consideration of numerous issues related to traffic, safety, and parking.

Thank you kindly for your attention.

Respectfully,

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