

2633 N. Hackett Avenue, Unit C
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53211-3834
June 29, 2022

Historic Preservation Commission
841 N. Broadway, Room B-1
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202

Re: Resolution relating to a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the existing parish hall, the construction of a new parish hall and the construction of a new four-story apartment building at 2618 N. Hackett Ave., in the Downer Avenue Commercial Historic District, for St. Mark's Church. (File # 220279)

Members of the Historic Preservation Commission:

As a writing teacher for many years, coherence routinely challenged my high school students because it is admittedly a subjective concept. Therefore, I grounded their learning with objective examples. One of the easiest to see and grasp was coherence in terms of paragraph length. The model essay was exemplary except for one of the body paragraphs that was obviously too long in comparison to the others. Like the proverbial sore thumb, it distracted from the essay because its size deviated from the developmental rhythm of the theme. Without much prompting, the students identified the comparative length of the offending paragraph and, in almost in the same breath, recommended a remedy: Split it up, Shorten it, Bring it in line with the others. And while they matured to learn about variety, such as the rhetorical effect of a dramatically short paragraph, they always had at their fingertips the very easy technique of eyeballing their papers to see if a single paragraph needed some subdivision to produce spatial consistency and, in turn, a unified whole.

When I apply this same simple review to the plans for the 55-unit apartment building on Hackett Avenue, I'm immediately struck by the size of the apartment building in comparison to the other 20th-century buildings in the Downer Historic District, for that is where this construction is proposed. It's too big! The District's 20th-century buildings, are at the most three stories high. Set side by side, the building's mass will eclipse St Mark's church and guild hall. In the same vein, its height will overshadow the homes to its east and the three-story condominiums to the west. The developers assert that their choice of brick and other external treatments take their cues from the fabric of the street. But of what value is the color of brick when this new construction dominates the street? Its size is incompatible with its surroundings.

When I look at the guidelines for new construction in the Downer Historic District, I see descriptive terms that I used when explaining coherence to my students; words like consistent, compatible, sympathetic, cohesive, and continuity are repeatedly used to direct the developers' understanding of appropriate siting, scale, and form. As a layman, I can appreciate these terms when I see them applied to existing buildings. Between Webster and Bradford, for example, the apartment building at 2533-37 Downer Avenue exhibits a pleasing aesthetic in terms of its

setback from the street, its three-story height, and its use of shared entrance courtyard. I would like to see something of this scale on Hackett: a three-story building with a setback in line with St Mark's existing setback. Something that not only takes its cues from the Historic District but integrates itself into the District in such a way that it seems to have always been there.

I'm not against development. But I am opposed to development that disrupts the spatial integrity of the neighborhood --- in a word, its coherence.

Cordially,

Phil Blenski