

Brooke Frizzell
2189 N. 55th Street
Milwaukee WI 53208

Dear City Plan Commission and Zoning, Neighborhoods, and Development Committee:

I write asking you to approve rezoning this parcel from RM3 to RM6.

I have served as the senior warden (president of the board of directors) at St. Mark's Episcopal Church since January 2022. Prior to this role, I served on the Vestry (board of directors) for four of the five previous years. I am thus very familiar with the process St. Mark's has gone through to bring us to this point.

If you read the Historic Preservation Commission staff report, you will see that our current parish hall building is in a state of significant disrepair. Additionally, we have only one entrance to the building that does not require stairs, we have no elevator to our basement or second floor, and we have no accessible restrooms. As a parish that strives to welcome all people regardless of physical ability, our current parish hall does not meet our community's needs.

Over the last decade, the disrepair of the building has been a significant drain on the parish's finances and energy. The status quo is not sustainable. We initially pursued a traditional capital campaign in order to raise funds to repair the building. However, we quickly learned that cost of making our building a sustainable and accessible space greatly exceeds the amount of money we can reasonably expect to raise from our parishioners. We only need look down the road a few miles to see what happens when a parish can no longer maintain its building, as St. James Episcopal Church closed its doors in 2017 and is now a commercial wedding venue.

To preserve our future, we therefore began to pursue other options. After much thought, discussion, and prayer, we decided the best course of action was to sell the underused portion of our land and use the proceeds to partially finance the construction of a new parish hall. We chose to sell to the DeMichele Company because we value our neighborhood and want to ensure that any developer builds something compatible with the neighborhood.

Changing the designation of this parcel to RM6 is wholly appropriate for this vibrant urban area. In just the two-block stretch of North Downer Avenue from East Webster Place to East Park Place, we find multiple medical offices, a bookstore, two coffee shops, multiple salons, a movie theater, five full-service restaurants, a bakery, a wine shop, a drug store, an optician, a dry cleaner, a fitness studio, a jeweler, a bank, a hardware store, and a grocery store. You would be hard pressed to find any neighborhood in the entire state of Wisconsin where a resident could access so many basic services in a two-block stretch.

Although not yet in force, Mayor Cavalier Johnson and Department of City Development Planning Manager Sam Leichtling have indicated an interest in revisiting the zoning code, as reported by Urban Milwaukee on July 25, 2022. In particular, they have indicated an interest in encouraging development along transit and allowing a greater number of housing styles. The

proposed apartment building fits perfectly within these goals. At four stories high, it will fit in well on a street that already features three-story multifamily buildings on the west side of the street. The surrounding neighborhood already has a mixture of both multifamily and single family housing. The proposal includes 69 underground parking spaces for 55 units, a number that significantly exceeds the minimum number of parking spaces required under current regulations. The parcel is also near a Bublr bikeshare station and is within a 12-minute walk of the Gold, Green, 21, 22, and 30 bus routes, making it an ideal location for those who live a car-free or car-light lifestyle. It is within walking and biking distance to two major East Side employers, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital. An additional 55 housing units will add foot traffic to the Downer Avenue commercial district and eyes on the street, which improves public safety.

This project will build on a surface parking lot currently used by St. Mark's. Although this parking lot is in disrepair and provides parking for only a small portion of our congregation, the church is nevertheless taking steps to mitigate the impact of the loss of the surface parking lot. St. Mark's has opened an account with Secure Parking, which operates a garage at the southeast corner of North Downer Avenue and East Bellevue Place. We will provide a validation code to our parishioners. Parishioners can therefore use the validation code to park in the garage at no cost to them when coming to church at any time during the week, whether for worship services, meetings, or community service events. Additionally, as I noted above, the church is located on numerous major bus lines, and the city operates a municipal parking lot at the northwest corner of North Downer Avenue and East Park Place. A number of parishioners also live walking distance from the church, and North Downer Avenue has a bike lane. My own family has been known to take the 21 bus or ride our bikes all the way from Washington Heights.

St. Mark's cares deeply for our neighborhood and our community. In fact, we recognize that the property taxes generated by the construction of the proposed apartment building will help the city to provide essential services. St. Mark's has ongoing relationships with Eastside Senior Services, The Gathering, Kinship Community Food Center, Milwaukee Diaper Mission, and Common Ground. We as a parish are deeply committed to social justice and to welcoming our LGBTQ+ neighbors. This work will not be possible if we must pour all of our resources into propping up a crumbling building, and our financial reality means that selling our property for development is the only realistic way to address our building needs.

Rezoning this parcel to RM6 will allow the church to meet its building needs, will add to the city's tax base, and will bring additional economic activity to the Downer Avenue commercial district. For these reasons, rezoning this parcel to RM6 is in the best interest of the city.

Sincerely,
Brooke Frizzell
Senior Warden, St. Mark's Episcopal Church