

TO: City Planning Commission

Re: Project 220401, proposed 55-unit apartment building for 2600 block of Hackett

From: Kay Wosewick, 2633 N Hackett Unit E

August 21, 2022

Yes, I have a two more broad objections to the proposed developments on the 2600 block of Hackett.

One question has troubled me a great deal since the Zoom meeting on June 13: why has this project been accorded what appears to be some sort of special status by the City of Milwaukee?

I went to Mayor Cavalier Johnson's office on the morning of June 14, less than a dozen hours after I watched St Mark's pastor, developer Michael DeMichele, and architect Jim Shields present virtually finished plans for two new contemporary buildings they propose to build directly across the street from my six large living room windows. The mayor was "not in", so I explained to the kind young man at the reception desk my concerns: that plans for a huge new apartment building were sprung on my neighbors and me the previous evening; that the plans were being filed that very day with the City's Historic office; that 28 days later the plan was to be presented to the Historic Preservation Commission for historic design approval and a COA that would enable the church to start tearing down their current addition less than six months later; and all of this was happening while affected residents did not have an alderman to represent our interests. I told him that we wanted the mayor to stop the process until we had an alderman to represent us, which wouldn't happen until November—not long before demolition was scheduled to start. The young man took my name and number and said someone would get in touch with me.

After a couple rounds of telephone tag, I finally had a phone conversation on Friday June 14 with Todd Miller, a staff member in the mayor's office. I explained the neighbors' collective request to have the project put on hold until we had an alderman to represent our concerns about the proposals, including our objection to a development process that was kept completely under wraps until the last possible moment. After several iterations of both of us explaining our position, I finally said (roughly) "so you are telling me that there is absolutely no chance that the mayor will put the proposals on hold until we have an alderman" to which he replied "No. The business of Milwaukee must go on." At least one other neighbor tried to convince the mayor to pause the process, but that request was also promptly denied.

Seriously, would putting two projects on pause break the City of Milwaukee? Of course not. Then why the rush? Why not support a fair and open process, especially since St Mark's kept the development of these proposals 100% hidden from neighbors until the night before paperwork was due for submission to the historic office to meet the deadline for the next Historic Preservation Commission meeting on July 11.

St Mark's went so far as to claim their Zoom meeting was held for the neighborhood's benefit, as a substitute for what would otherwise been a meeting run by our alderman. A meeting where both sides would have equal time to express their thoughts. Instead, St Mark' offered a chat box during the Zoom meeting, which was both ineffective and a distraction from listening to the presentation. The representatives for the proposals spoke without pause for an hour, then opened it up for questions. Twelve people were given the chance to speak. People running the meeting selected who could speak. A total of 12 voices were heard. One asked very neutral questions and another had technical difficulties and wasn't able to speak. Of the 10 remaining "community" speakers, 7 spoke in favor of the project and 3 against it. **Assuming each of the community members talked for about the same length of time, a total of 89% of the meeting was controlled by supporters of the project; a mere 11% of the meeting was controlled by objectors to the proposals. Given intensely diverging opinions about the proposals, this meeting cannot, in any way, be considered a valid replacement for a meeting led by an alderman.**

Another way these proposals seem to be getting an easy "pass" from the city is how the Historic Preservation Commission ran their meeting. Specifically, they avoided any discussion about how the proposals met or did not meet applicable historic guidelines. Furthermore, they treated objectors of the proposals unfairly and with extreme rudeness.

Both proposals are sited entirely on property within the Downer Historic District (DHD). The DHD has a readily available document that lists, and discusses, four criteria for new construction within the Historic District. The architect openly described both buildings as "modern" and "contemporary" in style. These words are nonexistent in the DHD guidelines for new construction. In fact, the guidelines repeatedly call for siting, scale, form, and materials that are compatible with other historic buildings in the District. **Both the Historic department and the Commission discussed the project as if those guidelines didn't exist.** Neither group offered any justification for approving the projects in the HPC meeting, nor was there any written explanation offered afterward. The City seems to favor certain groups/individuals/companies that have somehow achieved special status and do not have to follow guidelines/codes/laws/etc. that ordinary citizens must follow. If this is business as usual, then business as usual is biased, unfair and undemocratic.

Also, I'm compelled to describe how supporters and objectors of the proposals were treated. After an extraordinarily long presentation about the proposals, supporters were offered the first chance to speak. I cannot honestly remember if they were immediately limited to one minute, but I am certain they were not instructed to limit their comments to historic issues. Most spoke about their personal experience and relationship with the church. I cannot recall if they were immediately given one-minute limits or not.

When objectors were finally given the opportunity to speak, they were given strict one-minute limits and told they could ONLY discuss issues related to historic issues (I must say I find this almost hilarious given the Commission itself never talked about historic issues). Anyway, every

objector was closely timed and not allowed a second more than one minute to express their opinion. The hostility in the room was palpable. Please, whether you agree with what we have to say or not, if we are behaving like normal people (e.g., not screaming or making a scene), your position in city government should demand that you treat people with equal respect regardless of your personal opinions.

Finally, my last concern. St Mark's declares that their future depends on this apartment building. This fact should not play any role whatsoever in the decision to approve the proposal.

The status of the owner (in this case, an untaxed entity anticipating a large, untaxed wad of cash in their bank) should not be a consideration unless there is jaded history that is relevant (e.g., frequent delinquent accounts). In other words, there is absolutely no reason for this project to have special status that breaks established codes, rules, laws, guidelines, and common sense.

The US constitution is based on clear separation of church and state. Government entities should not grant a favorable decision for a church that would not be granted for any other businesses under identical circumstances (in this case, an entity with financial woes).

I trust you will give my objections serious consideration,

Sincerely,
Kay Wosewick