

October 25, 2023

RE: Objection to Certificate of Appropriateness for a new house to be built at 2409 N. Terrace Avenue in the North Point Historic District

Office of the City Clerk

Via email: jowsca@milwaukee.gov and lelmer@milwaukee.gov

We are writing to express concerns about the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the building plans currently before the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) for construction of a new house at 2409 N. Terrace Avenue in the City of Milwaukee. This is the third new house to be built along Terrace Avenue on property formerly owned by St Mary's Hospital in the heart of the North Point Historic District. The property is immediately south of our residence (2411 N. Terrace Ave.) and shares a property line with our lot. Our concerns are with the front setback proposed, the metal roof, grading, and the placement of the air conditioner condenser and four deep egress wells in the three foot setback along our driveway.

FRONT SETBACK

The use of the parcel in question has been a concern of the City and the Terrace Avenue neighborhood for some time. In 1975, St. Mary's, the City and a group of Terrace Avenue neighbors entered into a Boundary Impact Agreement to assure that any future development would "blend and be harmonious with the fine nearby residential" neighborhood. The Agreement promised that any future construction on the site would be limited to residential houses that "conform to the nearby setbacks and be harmonious in mass, height, and exterior architectural appeal to the nearby residences on Terrace Avenue. . ." The group of neighbors who secured the agreement from St. Mary's with the assistance of the City were some of the first members of the Historic Preservation Commission, and while the agreement they secured in 1975 has expired, the principles it established remain sound.

Those principles are reinforced by the current North Point North Historic District Guidelines for New Construction which provide that "New construction must reflect the traditional siting of buildings in North Point North. This includes setback,. . ." They also state "The building materials that are visible from the public right-of-way should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials traditionally used in North Point North. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be

maintained.” The Guidelines for Streetscapes state “Maintain the height, scale, mass and materials established by the buildings in the district and the traditional setback and density of the block faces. Avoid introducing elements that are incompatible in terms of siting, materials, height or scale.”

We chose to live on Terrace Avenue because of the historic nature of the neighborhood and the broad open feel of the Avenue. We have significant concerns about the impact of the submitted building plans as we understand them on the historic feel of the neighborhood. First, we object to the proposed front setback of only 25 feet. All of the historic homes to the North of 2409 are set back at least 30 feet. While the recently constructed homes to the south of 2409 are set a bit further forward (27.5 feet), the 2409 house (due to a two story box bay window extending the front facade of the house an additional foot or two on the north side) would stick out nearly six feet in front of our home and 2.5 feet in front of their neighbors to the south. As a result, instead of a gentle narrowing of the Avenue, the proposed house would jut out, blocking our and our historic neighbors’ light and view to the south and the open feel of the Avenue. The proposed setback violates the siting requirements for new construction in the North Point North district. We believe a set back of 30 feet would both comply with the Guidelines and be more consistent with the historic houses that make this neighborhood so desirable.

The siting of the home was one of the most critical issues when this Commission reviewed the last home that was proposed for this location. The exterior “look” of the building may change over time, but the siting of the home will remain amongst these historic 100 year old homes for the next 100 years. Please continue to support the preservation of the open historic appearance of the avenue.

We have enclosed petitions signed by more than 40 of our neighbors opposing construction of a home on the lot that doesn’t match the 30 foot setback of the historic houses.

METAL ROOFING

We have concerns about some of the construction materials proposed for the home. We note that none of the historic houses nearby have metal roofs, so the proposed material is not consistent with materials traditionally used in North Point North. A metal roof (though popular in modern construction) would not be in keeping with the asphalt, slate, and shake cedar construction of the other homes on the block, in violation of the

Guidelines. Metal roofing may have been used historically in industrial and agricultural settings, but it was not used in residential ones.

As the home closest to the proposed house, we are also worried about the noise of rain storms on the roof and which will be just outside our primary bedroom windows. Our windows are over 100 years old, and we were recently advised by the State Historical Society that we cannot replace them with newer wood windows that might help to diminish the noise. While metal roofs are well insulated inside to protect those dwelling in them from noise, there is nothing to protect those of us with historic homes that are nearby, and in our case, within 15 feet of the outside of the roof.

SETBACK INCURSIONS

We are concerned that the proposed plan places four deep egress window wells that will extend three feet out from their house, completely filling the setback space along the north side of their lot and extending to the northern property line. The window wells will fill the side setback so completely, egress from them will not be possible without using our land to step out onto. The illustrations of the house with landscaping the owners submitted show bushes and green space running along the north side. In fact, our driveway runs immediately along the north side of the property. There will be little room for any landscaping in the setback because of the deep egress wells proposed. We are concerned about the hazard these will create for unsuspecting pets, children and visitors to our home. While these types of wells may be desirable in suburban neighborhoods with large lots, they are not consistent with buildings in the North Point Historic District where driveways are narrow and homes are generally set up high enough so that basement windows are above grade. We request that the egress wells be eliminated or the owners be required to install fencing along the northern lot line to shield us from the hazards the wells will create.

In addition, the owners plan to place the condenser for their air conditioner in the north side setback space along our drive, visible from Terrace Avenue and filling the set back so that it will be difficult to service without using our land. When we installed air conditioning in our home last year, one of the conditions required by the Historical Society was that the condenser not be visible from the street. We placed the condenser behind our house on the flat roof of our garage. The two new homes constructed to the south of this property have also located their AC condensers on the back sides of their garages to keep them hidden from the street and their residential neighbors. We ask that our new neighbors be held to the same standards and be required to put the condenser behind their house or on their garage roof.

GRADING

Finally, the owners plan to remove the 100 year old concrete retaining wall at the end of our drive, which holds back their higher grade property from falling onto our driveway. We are concerned about potential grading issues this disruption will create due to elevation differences and seek written plans that assure that the construction will not result in water and soil run-off onto our driveway and damage to our historic home.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns. Please enter this objection and these petitions objecting to the proposal into the record for the Historic Preservation Commission meeting scheduled for Monday, November 6, 2022.

Thank you.

Sheila Reynolds and Robert Chang
2411 N. Terrace Avenue
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