July 14, 2016

Via E-mail – clee@milwaukee.gov.
Honorable Members of the Zoning, Neighborhoods & Development Committee
City of Milwaukee
City Hall
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Re: 1550 N. Prospect Ave.

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to you – and by copies of this letter, to other relevant city officials – to urge rejection of the zoning changes called for by the proposed new Detailed Planned Development for the property at 1550 N. Prospect Avenue, the site of the historic Goll Mansion. The proposed development would shoehorn a massive high rise apartment building behind the Mansion, filling up virtually every square foot of space on the lot, pressing up to within three and a half feet of the neighboring property to the south, where I live, and looming far out over the bluff above the bike trail on the lake side. I don't believe that any reasonable person, if asked to design the best and most size-appropriate building for this particular space, would come up with anything like this design. The question then is whether the proposed building, although not ideal, is nevertheless *acceptable* – i.e., whether you should approve the zoning changes requested. The answer to that question, I firmly believe, is no. A decision approving the Plan would be deleterious, not only for this particular property, but for the long-term health and livability of the neighborhood.

A plan to construct a high-rise on the Goll House property was first presented to the City in 2005-06. That proposal was for 35 residential units. In a letter to the Zoning Committee of the Common Council expressing support for the project, DCD Commissioner Rocky Marcoux referred to the planned building as "slender." The present proposed development, which contemplates nearly six times as many units, in a building of significantly greater bulk, can hardly be said to be slender. Enormous, maybe. Monumental, perhaps. "Hulking" might come to mind. But slender, no.

At a reported 360,000 square feet, the proposed building would be virtually *three times* the size currently suggested by the City's zoning standards as appropriate for the site. It appears to be roughly the same size as the apartment building reportedly planned by Barry Mandel for a lot approximately two blocks to the south on Prospect. However, Mandel's lot does not have an existing building already on it, the lot is *significantly* larger than the Goll House property, and there is ample side space between the side boundaries and the structures on either side to allow for

the passage of light and air. A 200-unit building on *that* lot might make sense. In contrast, such a building, squeezed onto a 0.64 acre property like the Goll Mansion site, which already has an existing structure that will be retained (albeit moved to the curb), does not.

With a projected 200 units and 360 bedrooms, the building proposed for 1550 N. Prospect would likely house 300 to 350 people, the majority of whom will undoubtedly own cars. Yet, the plan submitted calls for something on the order of only 230 parking spaces for residents, a number which, I believe, will fall well short of what will be needed. In previous public hearings, the developer has attempted to make light of these numbers, citing the desire of millennials to walk or bike to work. Well, I myself often walk to work, but that does not mean I don't need and use a car. I expect that the same would be true for the majority of residents for the proposed building at the Goll Mansion site. And lest it be thought that this is simply a problem for the developer to work out as he assesses the viability of his project, I would remind the Committee that if he is wrong, people will be searching for parking on the street every day. As it is, a fair number of people living in the area reside in older buildings that do not have attached parking, and they struggle to find parking on a daily basis. Imagine adding to their problem the competition for space that will result from visitors and residents of this proposed, high density high rise. Moreover, if the streetcar route is extended up Prospect, as has been discussed, the impact would be amplified, since the streetcar line presumably would take up a lane of parking.

Compounding the potential traffic and parking problems posed by this proposal is the fact that the developer's plans call for a mere two guest parking spaces for visitors. Think about that. *Two parking spaces, for deliveries and visitors for a 202-unit apartment building.* By way of comparison, the building next door, where I live, has less than half the number of units yet offers six times more parking spaces for vendors and guests. Even so, from time to time all of those guest parking spaces are taken. One can only imagine the problems that will be posed for people attempting to visit or service the proposed Goll House tower who cannot find a place to park on premises.

There is more. The plans for the development provide no turnaround drive. This means that visiting cars, trucks and emergency vehicles coming to the building will have to back out, on to Prospect Avenue, in order to leave the property. Moreover, there is no provision for moving vans to park and load/unload. Apartment buildings are generally subject to a higher rate of turnover than are occupant-owned residential properties, so move-ins and move-outs will not be uncommon. When they occur, if this building is allowed to go forward as proposed, the vans will presumably have to park on the street, in front of the building, further exacerbating traffic and parking problems. And if the streetcar line goes in, will there even be room for large vehicles like moving vans to park along the curb?

Good property developments improve neighborhoods and increase everyone's property values. The proposed development does the opposite: property values in the immediate neighborhood will almost certainly decline if the proposed building is built as planned. For certain, the proposed plan would severely impact the property values of the 90 or so home owners in my building, as well as that of the owners of the building to the north of the subject property, thereby *lowering* the tax basis the City can rely on for these properties. This will necessarily follow from

the fact that in order to maximize his rentable square footage, the developer for the proposed development intends to push the building both to the northern and southern sides of the lot and to the eastern boundary of the property, abutting the bike path right of way. By extending the building so far to the east, in contrast for example to what the designer for the building at 1522 N. Prospect did, the development will severely impede the sight lines to the lake for the other residents along the street, inevitably reducing the fair market value of their residences.

With respect to that eastern side, it is estimated that up to 50 percent of the footprint for the proposed building would be extended past the crest of the bluff overlooking the bike trail. A 20-story building cantilevered that far into space will have to be built on pilings. Siting the building this far to the east entails consequences not only for the views available to existing residents on Prospect Avenue, but for the integrity of the bluff and the neighboring structures as well. Yet, with major pile-driving required, and with the long-term effects of the sheer weight of a 20-plus story building on fulcrum point of the bluff unknown, no engineering study or geological impact report has been offered by the developer or required by the City.

Beyond the structural issues, the effect on the bike path of this push to the east will be significant. People who use the path like to feel they are in a park, not like they are taking a tour of Wall Street, with buildings towering above. The zoning scheme that pre-dated the current DPD for the site wisely included restrictions on both front *and* rear setbacks. If rear-property setbacks are ignored, the ultimate result will be that future developments along Prospect Avenue will follow the same press to the east, in order to compete with the vista-hogging Goll House tower, and the bike path will eventually become like the bottom of a culvert, with retaining walls of the parking structures and buildings above replacing the natural growth that exists there now.

A planned development district is appropriate only where it encourages development which is "compatible with its surroundings." (Sect. 295-907.1, Milw. Zoning Code). In this instance, the opposite would be true. The architect's renderings for the proposed project show a building standing serenely on a hill, surrounded by blue sky and white clouds. The building looks beautiful, the setting idyllic. Who could object to such a development? The problem is that in order to convey a sense of spaciousness, the drawing does not realistically depict the proximity of the surrounding buildings, up against which the apartment tower would cram. Rather, they come off like ghost structures, almost ethereal. Nor does the picture realistically portray the building's size in relation to the lot it will be built on. One cannot appreciate from the drawing the extent of the problems that a building of this bulk, on a lot this size, with inadequate parking and traffic options, will cause for city infrastructure and the livability of the area. And of course, the rendering contains no hint of the potentially deleterious impact the project could have on the integrity of the bluff and the neighboring properties.

We hear much about the tax base, and I appreciate that that is a major consideration for the city. But unlike ten years ago, virtually every month now there are reports and visible signs of new multi-unit housing projects going up in the downtown area of Milwaukee. Likewise, a number of major office buildings are either under construction or in the planning stages. All of these will eventually strengthen the tax base. And if there is a continuing market for high rise apartment buildings downtown, they will be built. This is true regardless of what happens to the property at

1550 N. Prospect. In the meantime, I hope that the city will not undermine the character of Prospect Avenue which brought people back to the area to begin with and which contributes to the existing property values along the street.

Zoning decisions involve thinking about long-range consequences for a neighborhood. The drawings for this project depict a beautiful building, and the developer and architect are to be commended for that. But the building just does not belong on this site. Its size, bulk and density are dictated by the desire to cram as much rentable space onto the property as possible, not by the nature and limitations of the site or the needs of the neighborhood. I urge the Committee to consider those limitations and those needs and to reject the proposed Detailed Planned Development.

Very truly yours,

Christopher T. Kolb
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Milwaukee, WI 53202

cc: Mayor Tom Barrett (via email)
Ald. Robert Bauman (via email)
Dept. of City Development Commissioner Rocky Marcoux (via email)