

Via Email – PlanAdmin@milwaukee.gov.

City Plan Commission
Dept. of City Development
809 N. Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Re: File No. 170406
Proposed development for 1550 N. Prospect Ave.

Dear Commission Members:

I am writing to you -- and by way of copies of this letter, to the Mayor and other officials -- to express my concern over the latest proposal to put up a monumental high rise building behind a relocated Goll House mansion on Prospect Avenue. While press accounts quote the architect for the project as touting modifications made since last year's submission by the same developer, the actual changes are relatively minimal and seem more designed to enable the developer to *claim* substantive modification than to effectively address the very real problems with this project. Those problems include the likely impact on the bluff overlooking the bike trail resulting from the erection of a 27-story building situated so far -- further than any of its neighbors -- out on the bluff; the likely deleterious effect on the structural integrity of neighboring buildings (including 1522 N. Prospect, where I live) that will be caused by the pile-driving necessary to anchor a bluff-perched high-rise into the soil behind the Goll House; and the potential major traffic and parking problems for a neighborhood already stretched thin in those respects and likely to experience even more stress if the street car line is extended as contemplated.

Good property developments improve neighborhoods and increase everyone's property values. The proposed development is likely to do the opposite. For certain, the proposed plan would severely impact the property values of the 90 or so home owners in my building. Indeed, the assessed value for my home *declined* in the most recent assessment, with the only possible reason being the prospect of a project such as the one proposed for next door. More importantly, the current proposal, which contemplates shoehorning a huge building between the Goll Mansion and the bike path and nature trail behind and below the property, would have a deleterious long-term impact on the neighborhood as a whole, inevitably changing for the worse the character of the block, the traffic and parking patterns on the street, and the parkland to the east.

As reported, the developer plans to move the Goll House *twice*, first towards the rear of the lot, to allow for a new foundation to be laid closer to Prospect Avenue, and then, after the foundation has been laid, forward onto its new platform, so that the mansion ultimately comes to rest some 36 feet closer to the sidewalk than it currently does. The developer would then construct a massive 27-story building, with 192 apartments, behind the relocated mansion. Assuming the 119 year old Goll House survives the moving process and the pile-driving necessary for construction of the new building sited only a few feet behind it, the Goll House would thus be converted to something like a brownstone, dwarfed by the huge apartment tower behind it.

The Historic Designation Study Report, which was prepared by the Department of City Development in conjunction with the approval of historic preservation status for the Goll House in 2002, declared that any new construction on the property “must respect the historic siting of the house,” must “be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the house from the street as a free-standing structure,” must have a building height and bulk which is “compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the house,” and must create a roof profile which “express[es] the same continuity established by the historic building.” (Report, p. 16).

Could one imagine any structure *less* respectful of the historic siting of the Goll House, *less* compatible with the height and bulk of that building, *more* discontinuous with the design of the original building, than a massive, multi-story high-rise towering above a Goll Mansion which has been literally and figuratively pushed to the curb? My understanding is that the current owners of the Goll Mansion must seek a revised planned development district (PDD) plan for the site. By law, 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 proposed development would inevitably create long-term traffic and parking problems on Prospect. Unless the owners plan to rent virtually exclusively to singles, the planned 212 indoor parking spaces for the residents seem likely to fall short of what would be needed. As it is, many of the people living on Prospect Avenue, who reside in older buildings that do not have attached parking, struggle to find parking on the street. Imagine adding to their problem the competition from visitors and residents of this proposed, high density high rise which could be home to upwards of 300 or more residents. And imagine the effect on traffic on Prospect of all the cars setting out in the morning or coming home at night.

A building the size of the one proposed would be large for a normal-sized lot. The lot in question, however, is smaller than usual, and there is already a building on the space – the Goll House. Moreover, the problem is not only the heft of the structure or the number of proposed rental units. As planned, the building will be sited at the easternmost limits of the property, at the edge of the bluff. A looming high-rise built virtually on the rear property line of the Goll House site will adversely affect the bike path below (the city and county residents who use the path like to feel they are in a park, not like they are taking a tour of Wall Street), and if rear-property setbacks are ignored, the ultimate result will be that future developments will follow the same press to the east, in order to compete with the vista-hogging Goll House Tower. As a consequence, 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.

Those changes I believe will happen, although admittedly not for years. What *will* happen immediately are the impact on the bluff and neighboring structures that can be expected from the construction process, the parking and traffic problems likely to result once the building is occupied, and the loss of “breathing spaces” between the building and its neighbors, which otherwise are common in the area, even where high-rises have been constructed, and which allow for light and views to abide for everyone using or living on the street.

In sum, this is too big a building for the location. The design is appealing, to be sure. But the verdict on this project should be: beautiful building; wrong place. I hope that the city will not undermine the very

mixed-style housing and green space character of Prospect Avenue which brought people back to the area to begin with and which contributes to the existing property values in the area. In short, I hope that the decision-makers bear in mind the very civic values inherent in historic preservation, fairness of zoning regulations, and long-term planning and remember that market forces will, and have, taken care of supplying new housing in the downtown area without the need to do violence to those values. Approving such dramatic changes to the Goll House site as are being proposed would be a mistake, which I urge you to not make.

Very truly yours,



Christopher T. Kolb
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Milwaukee, WI 53202

cc: Mayor Tom Barrett
Ald. Robert Bauman
Dept. of City Development, Commissioner Rocky Marcoux
Office of the City Clerk