



West 7th / Fort Road Federation

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July 30, 2021

Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee

City of Saint Paul

Attn: menaka.mohan@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Subject: Homeless Services Zoning Study

Dear Members of the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee:

This letter contains recommendations from the Fort Road Federation on the potential changes to Chapter 65, Article III – 65.200 Civic and Institutional Uses in the Saint Paul zoning code. The Fort Road Federation has done considerable community engagement and hosted on-going conversations with neighbors, business owners, and others on our needs and concerns about Freedom House.

The Fort Road Federation hosted a community meeting prior to the opening of Freedom House in November 2020 that was attended by about 40 people. This meeting was to provide feedback to the city on neighborhood needs in the lease agreement between the city and Freedom House. Between April 2021 and June 2021, we co-hosted bi-weekly meetings with Councilperson Noecker, Saint Paul Police, and neighbors to address concerns as they arose and provide information to neighbors regarding Freedom House.

Our recommendation and concerns outlined in this letter were gathered at a community meeting held on July 14, 2021. More than 60 neighbors and business owners attended.

The feedback that the Fort Road Federation received is that the neighborhood does not support the proposed change. The neighborhood recommends that the 'homeless services facility' use only be listed in the zoning districts with a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), and that a standard condition be annual review of the property's CUP. Neighbors recognize and appreciate the need for day shelters with services for people experiencing homelessness. Neighbors understand the role that our neighborhood can and should play in supporting our homeless neighbors.

The Fort Road Federation coordinates participation in advocacy and planning and builds community connections for the residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations of the West 7th neighborhood so that it is a place where people want to live, work, and play.

The neighborhood supports the existence of homeless service centers but feel that the Freedom House site is not a good fit for these services at the level of demand that is currently present.

Concerns we would like to see addressed now and should be part of a CUP's standard conditions as well as evaluation or review process include:

- Safety and security. Neighbors expressed the need for a greater security presence and proactive approaches to safety. People would like a greater security presence throughout the day, but particularly in the evening as people leave Freedom House and into the night. Some Freedom House visitors remain in the area after the facility closes and there have been issues with the vacant lot where the dry cleaner was and the shuttered Burger King on Grand Avenue near Ramsey Street. Neighbors were often reluctant to call the police for nuisance behaviors and would like one number to call to report issues. They are also interested in a greater presence of homeless outreach workers.
- Enforcement of city regulations for property maintenance and criminal activity. Neighbors are concerned that the condition of the building Freedom House is in, combined with nearby vacant buildings, gives a perception of blight. Code enforcement and beautification efforts may increase positive perceptions and behaviors and decrease nuisance or illegal behaviors like drug use in vacant parking lots after 8 p.m. Litter and needles were reported as problems.
- Location of homeless service facilities in relation to other uses of the area. The section of West Seventh Street extending from Kellogg Boulevard to Grand Avenue is the gateway to the neighborhood and an entertainment corridor for the city and surrounding areas. As more people visit the area for entertainment and to visit local businesses, neighbors are concerned about the concentration of people experiencing homelessness in one area. Supporting a CUP process that allows homeless services facilities to open in other areas of the city may relieve some of the emerging pressures. In addition, while the current zoning proposal does not allow homeless service centers in areas zoned single-family residential, many people live in multi-unit housing in areas where the service centers would be permitted and further study of the impacts on people living in apartments and condominiums is needed. Neighbors would also like to better understand and mitigate the potential financial impact in terms of changes in property values or insurance costs.

Unrelated to this recommendation, but still important, was a desire by neighbors to better understand homelessness in Saint Paul overall, how existing programs and services meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, and what plans exist to address homelessness. People wondered how services like Freedom House impact the clients they serve and whether or how homeless service centers help to reduce or end homelessness. The Fort Road Federation plans to hold an informational meeting on these topics for neighbors to increase

neighborhood understanding of the issue and how we can support homeless neighbors. We appreciate the city's support in these education efforts.

Sincerely,

Dana DeMaster

Dana DeMaster
President

CC: Planning Commission
CM Noecker
Deputy Mayor Tincher
Ricardo Cervantes, DSI
Bill Dermody, PED
Molly Jalma, Listening House