



Date: August 28, 2020

**RE: Amendments to the RM zoning standards**

St. Paul City Councilmembers,

On behalf of Sustain Saint Paul, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendments to the RM Residential Multi-Family zoning standards. We have reviewed the amendments and discussed them at our Board meeting and at a membership meeting. We strongly support the amendments, as recommended to you by the Saint Paul Planning Commission.

The amendments enable more efficient use of land to accommodate the expected growth in city households over the next 20 years. This is achieved by reducing minimum rear setbacks, allowing greater height under some circumstances, and using FAR (floor area ratio) to guide allowed building density instead of units per lot size. When a lot can accommodate more housing units, then less land is needed for residential growth and more land can be used for jobs or open space. Greater residential density supports transit and thereby reduces dependence on cars. Perhaps most importantly, more units per lot improve the financial viability of affordable housing.

There is one change that Sustain hoped to see, which is not included in the recommendations. This is a reduction in off-street parking requirements for all RM projects, not just in proximity to high use transit corridors. Reduced parking standards would significantly enhance land use efficiency and development cost per unit. Sustain plans to elevate its voice on the topic of reduced citywide parking standards in the coming months.

In conclusion, we consider the anticipated benefits of the relatively moderate RM changes to be a good value. As proposed, the standards are a return to the traditional form and density of multi-family structures built in our city in the first half of the 20th Century, before the more restrictive RM standards were adopted. We urge you as leaders of our communities to embrace the recommended amendments to the RM standards, which reflect the shared values of Sustain and the City of Saint Paul -- fiscal responsibility, environmental sustainability, transit supportive density, and housing affordability.

Thank you for your leadership,

Elizabeth Wefel  
Co-Chair, Sustain Saint Paul