

June 13, 2012

Dear Councilman Stark,

We are writing in support of the neighbors' appeal of the St. Paul Planning Commission's May 18, 2012 approval of the site plan application for construction of a student apartment at the corner of Grand and Finn, #12-0370-383 and in support of the ordinance to limit student rentals in our neighborhood. We feel that both of these actions are necessary to preserve neighborhood balance and livability.

We have lived in our Lincoln Avenue home for over 30 years. We raised our family here. We have always recognized and appreciated our neighborhood's wonderful qualities and, in return, have been good neighbors and good citizens. Our close proximity to the University of St. Thomas has provided a continual source of tension with potential for conflict, but until recently, we have felt that the positive aspects of our neighborhood outweighed any drawbacks. Recent events and trends, however, have us second-guessing our decision to live and invest in the city of St. Paul. Also, it would appear that we value St. Paul more than St. Paul values residents like us; at the May 18 Planning Commission meeting, commissioners expressed sympathy for the neighbors yet were unwilling to support action to protect our neighborhood.

We object to the proposed building on the corner of Grand and Finn due to issues of size, height, setback, parking, and occupant use and density. By design and intent, this building will function as a St. Thomas dorm. By creating highly concentrated student residences, this building will increase density but not diversity in our neighborhood. The developer has indicated that this building will address the problem of single-family homes becoming student rentals. We do not believe that students will choose to live in mean, cramped, closet-less dorm rooms where they are not allowed to be in the yard (because it is the roof of the underground parking structure) if they can live in a house with more square footage and outdoor space. Students will continue to seek single-family neighborhood homes to rent and the dorm will bring an even higher concentration of students into our neighborhood.

That is why we feel that both the rental ordinance and the revocation of the approval for the proposed dorm are needed.

We support the contention of the neighbors' appeal that the proposed building does not meet parking requirements. Even if the building did provide 40 appropriately sized parking spaces, parking would still be a major concern for us. We fully expect that the developer's charge for parking will far exceed the \$10/year cost of a neighborhood parking permit. If parking permits are available to dorm residents, many would choose to get permits rather than park in the building. This building would increase the density on the land it occupies from 12 residents to 80 residents. The developer should be required to provide supports to accommodate this drastic increase in density; after all, his interest in creating such a high-density building is to increase his personal profit. We feel he should be required to provide parking in excess of the bare minimum required by current zoning so that the livability of the neighborhood is protected as he seeks to maximize his profit. His current plan is to use the street in front of our house as his parking lot.

We hope that the council will overturn the Planning Commission's approval for the dorm on the corner of Grand and Finn. But if the project is allowed to occur as planned, we hope that zoning requirements will be strictly enforced and no variances will be granted before, during, or after construction. Although, we feel that the current zoning requirements are inappropriate and inadequate for our neighborhood and that this project should further meet the requirements of the St. Thomas CUP because it will function as a dorm, the current zoning requirements are what we have to protect our neighborhood right now. This project is very tightly designed to meet zoning requirements; situations may arise during construction that would cause the developer to seek variances, using his investment and partially built structure to bully the city into granting such variances. We understand that no one can be prevented from applying for variances. But it would seem most fair to make it clear to the developer that, in all likelihood, he will not receive variances and that the responsibility for completing his project within zoning requirements rests squarely on his shoulders, so that he can plan accordingly.

Finally, it was stated at a Planning Commission meeting that the neighbors could not have it both ways—that it was unreasonable to expect to limit the development of large high-density student buildings while limiting student rental of single-family homes; the students have to live somewhere. We are not seeking to ban students from our neighborhood, only to preserve balance and diversity. There are currently 1,700 students living in the neighborhoods within a 1-mile radius of St. Thomas. We would hope that all residents, student and non-student alike, behave as responsible citizens and treat each other respectfully. We feel that a tipping point has been reached, however, and that an increase in student concentration and rental houses would have a negative impact on our neighborhood. We feel that the most appropriate place for students to live is on-campus. The 2004 St. Thomas CUP indicated that a residential village would be built on the blocks between Summit, Cleveland, Grand, and Cretin. St Thomas has stated that it is not fiscally able to build student housing at this time. In recent years, however, they have completed major projects such as a science building, an athletic center, and a student

center; they have set their priorities and made their choices. It would seem that they are content to let the surrounding neighborhoods provide student housing so that they can use their land and money for other purposes. The neighborhoods should not bear sole responsibility for solving St. Thomas housing needs.

Sincerely,

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