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via email

Council President Kathy Lantry & Members of the City Council
Third Floor, St. Paul City Hall
15 Kellogg Boulevard West
St. Paul, MN 55102

Re: Victoria Park Master Plan Modifications

Dear Councilmembers,

On first glance it may appear that the objections I have raised regarding the major modifications to the Victoria Park Master Plan revolve around views to the river bluffs that are being lost by a campus that depended upon the integrity of the existing master plan under which they invested 55 million dollar.

In reality, this loss of views is merely a symptom of a master planning process that has gone off course resulting in a series of proposed modifications that destroy not just one property's views, but the value of other neighboring parcels and the vision of a well planned urban design.

Injecting a major institutional use adjacent to and between two parcels of land designated for residential uses is problematic in the best of situations. In the case of Victoria Park and the proposed Nova Academy this juxtaposition of uses creates a situation that many potential residents would deem untenable. In particular the partial block bounded by Mercer Way, Kay Avenue, Victoria Way and the proposed institutional use will experience significant negative impacts and loss of value.

Rather than being include as part of a regularized block of homes with similar scaled buildings separated from other uses by public streets as envisioned in the original master plan, this partial block will be dominated by the wall of an institutional building that extends the entire width of the block from Mercer Way to Victoria Way (See Figures 1 & 3). In addition, a surface parking lot will dominate the views of the river bluffs from this parcel of land (Figure 2).

The residential parcel fronting Kay Avenue at Madson Street, though not as seriously impacted, will face onto a large blank gymnasium wall, rather than being integrated into a residential neighborhood. A properly conceive master plan would work to mitigate these negative impacts, not support and encourage them.



Figure 1: Master plan indicating institutional use adjacent to residential uses.

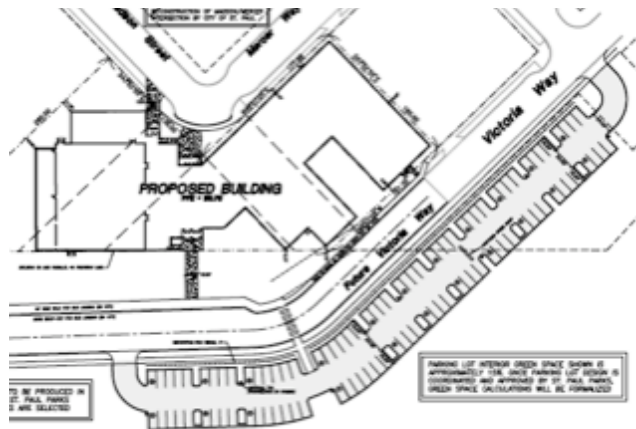


Figure 2: Surface parking (discouraged in TN zoning) across from a residential parcel. This parking lot appears only once, on Plate 9, of the master plan with no description of use or intent.



Figure 3: 42' tall by 150' long vertical wall adjacent to residential parcel. Zoning allows this elevation to be located 12'-0" away from adjoining homes. Mechanical equipment on the roof will increase this mass.

Unfortunately the input of neighbors was not solicited at the beginning of this process. A properly constituted citizen participation process could have prevented the conflicts you

see today. Yet, there is still time to execute a plan that will not destroy value and trust, but rather create greater value for not only the affected landowners, but the city as a whole. One approach to changes in the Victoria Park Master Plan is pictured below.



Figure 4: Proposed alternate master plan modification. The realigned road along Victoria Way is not required, but suggested to provide a softer edge to the parkland.

This approach is achievable and would create value where otherwise it would be lost. In this master plan modification a reasonable portion of the original street grid is retained, residential uses are situated to form a contiguous neighborhood, views to the bluff are maintained and provided for additional residential uses, and the institutional use is accommodated with few detrimental impacts. This proposed master plan will also allow significant reuse of much of the design work that has been developed for the school.

Now is the time for the HRA to request an extension of the 60-day deadline for a decision on this issue. If the City Council directs all of the effected parties to work toward this common goal, I believe that a neighborhood master plan can be executed of which we can all be proud.

Sincerely,

Gaius G. Nelson
Individually and as a Planning Commissioner

Cc: Lucy Thompson
Mayor Christopher Coleman