

From: [Patrick Smith](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul>Contact-Council](#)
Subject: In Support of Lexington Station Apartments
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 3:24:11 AM

Members of the City Council,

As a resident of St. Paul and the Hamline-Midway neighborhood, I am writing in support of the Lexington Station Apartments project and I urge my City Council representatives to approve this project. I have no personal connection to, or financial stake in, the project but I am in support of badly needed housing in the City of St. Paul.

First and foremost, I believe there is no legal basis for the Planning Commission's denial of this project. If a project meets all zoning regulations, as this project does, it must be approved. If the Council chooses to ignore this, the city *deserves* to lose in a court appeal, wasting everyone's time and taxpayer dollars in the process. Further, though, it will set a harmful precedent and increase the likelihood that other much-needed housing in the city--whether market-rate or affordable--will be rejected or hindered in the future. Indeed, the types of affordable housing projects that opponents of this project say they want more of are often the most threatened by NIMBY opposition, which will inevitably find arbitrary reasons and leverage veto points in the system to prevent any housing from being built. Caving to these tactics will only encourage more in the future, and further exacerbate the housing crisis by increasing costs and decreasing the amount of housing that is built. The City Council must make a clear statement that projects which meet the zoning requirements will be approved.

In addition, I believe the arguments made by opponents of this project are misguided and incorrect. In contrast to their claims that building new housing on an *empty* lot will lead to displacement, many recent studies show that building new market-rate housing decreases rents in the surrounding area and prevents displacement of low-income people. Journalist Noah Smith [cites several studies](#)^[1], including one that finds "rents fall by 2% for parcels within 100m of new construction [and] [r]enters' risk of being displaced to a lower-income neighborhood falls by 17%," and another showing that "new buildings decrease nearby rents by 5 to 7 percent relative to locations slightly farther away or developed later." This makes perfectly logical sense, as when you increase the supply of housing, there is less competition for existing housing and prices fall, or at least increase more slowly than they would otherwise. On the other hand, if you fail to build enough housing, as St. Paul has done for decades, prices and rents rise rapidly, and higher-income people can outbid lower-income people, leading to displacement. We do not need to twist our logic to theorize about future displacement that critics claim *would* happen because of this project; the displacement is *already happening* in plain sight of everyone, all across the city, and the only solution is to allow new housing to be built. Not only would this project not hurt the neighborhood, it would strengthen it. 288 new units of mixed-income housing where only a field (and sometimes a soot-covered snowpile) exists currently means hundreds of new neighbors supporting local businesses and restaurants along University Avenue; taking the Green Line to work and study and explore; volunteering their time and energy to local causes; supporting local music and art scenes; and paying taxes to the city to support services for all residents.

The sustainability case against this project is similarly lacking. Building energy efficient, dense housing a block from a light rail station and walking distance to several bus lines and bike routes, so that residents may choose a car-free or car-lite lifestyle, is exactly what is envisioned in the city's sustainability goals. We should maximize the phenomenal public resource that is the Green Line by allowing this project and many more like it, all along its route. Climate change adds to the imperative of allowing as much dense housing as possible in areas where it can be most effectively utilized.

In conclusion, letting this field sit vacant for another five or ten years while we wait for the "perfect" development that satisfies everyone to come along (which will never happen), as the housing crisis gets deeper and deeper, is not an option. The Council must take its responsibilities seriously and approve this project. Beyond this project, though, I implore the Council to find ways to facilitate the building of all types of housing throughout the city-- market-rate and affordable, for-profit and non-profit, public and private, large multifamily and "missing middle" and ADU's and everything in between. I truly believe housing is an issue, perhaps even *the most* important issue, that affects all the goals we care about as residents of St. Paul--equity, sustainability, affordability, fiscal health, and the overall strength of our community. A growing and healthy city needs adequate housing for all its current residents as well as for those who would like to move here in the future. Let's not become a cautionary tale like so many others who have failed the housing test. We have a chance to solve this problem but it is time to act with urgency.

Sincerely,

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[1] Noah Smith, "The Left-NIMBY Canon," January 19, 2021,
<<https://noahpinion.substack.com/p/the-left-nimby-canon>>