

St Paul City Council President Amy Brendmoen

St Paul City Council Members:

Dai Thao, Rebecca Noecker, Chris Tolbert, Mitra Jalali, Nelsie Yang, Jane Prince

Dear Council Members:

I write on behalf of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAH) to urge you to reject the current Alatus appeal to build the Lexington Station Apartments at the previous Wilder Foundation site. This proposal is a step backwards for racial and economic justice. It is also clearly ill-timed; it is the wrong moment for this proposal.

First, this is a moment when the Twin Cities are holding their breath awaiting the outcome of the Derek Chauvin trial for the murder of George Floyd. It is a bad time for the St. Paul City Council to be violating the first design principle of your 2040 Comprehensive Plan for equity and opportunity, including access to housing for all city residents. And second, within a matter of weeks, millions if not billions of dollars are moving into state and federal coffers to address urgent needs that have been unmet both through the COVID pandemic and for years before. Those dollars could be supporting residential building projects that are designed to serve the actual people already living, often in substandard, crowded, and overpriced housing, in neighborhoods like Union Park, Frogtown, Hamline-Midway, and Summit-University. The Lexington site should be reserved for a developer who will make significant, enforceable commitments to build truly affordable housing that St Paul's working citizens deserve.

As background, we do want to point out that the proposed project would be built next to the Green Line's Lexington Station. When the METRO Green Line was being planned, MICAH was deeply involved in the Stops for Us campaign, which worked to prevent the line from having a negative impact on residents along the corridor – and particularly the neighborhood that used to be Rondo. MICAH's 2014 transit corridor policy on development near station areas called for 50% of all housing units built near station areas to be affordable; for 20% of all new rental units to be affordable at the 20% Area Median Income level, and 30% of all new rental units to be affordable at the 30% Area Median Income level. (MICAH Transit Corridor Policy, 2014.)

Apartments affordable only to people making 60% of the Area Median Income are NOT affordable in any real way to blue collar and working class people in St. Paul. (Nor do the market rate studio apartments that the developer has made vague and unenforceable promises to put in somehow add "affordability" to this project.) In truth, across the City of St Paul, the deepest need of working class families with children – children in St Paul Public Schools -- is not for studio apartments, but for 2, 3 and 4 bedroom units at 20% or 30% SMI income levels.

On behalf of MICAH, we urge you to stand for equity and opportunity, including access to housing for all city residents, including its children, who are the future of this city. St Paul's Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color have clearly spoken up – the current proposal does not meet their needs. They should be heard and honored.

Elaine Tarone, Member, MICAH St Paul Chapter