



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: May 25, 2012
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Neighborhood Committee
RE: Student Housing Zoning Study

Introduction

In August, 2011, the City Council, via Ordinance 11-70, requested that the Planning Commission conduct a zoning study regarding conversion of owner-occupied single-family homes and duplexes to college student rentals. The study request was accompanied by a moratorium on such conversions for a period of one year. The moratorium applies to the area bounded by Fairview, St. Clair, Mississippi River Boulevard, and I-94, excluding Town and Country Club and the residential area immediately to the north. The moratorium will expire on August 11, 2012.

Study Process

In late October, an open house was held at the Merriam Park recreation center to gather public input on the impacts of student housing on residential neighborhoods and to identify potential solutions to the problem. Approximately 50-75 people attended the open house, along with staff from DSI and PED, and Ward 4 Councilmember Russ Stark and his aide. Generally, open house attendees were in two categories: home owners concerned about the impacts of student housing and student behavior on quality of life and property values, and rental property owners either concerned about or in outright opposition to any restrictions on student rentals.

In addition, the planning staff has researched what other cities have done to address the impacts on neighborhoods of student rental housing. The results of the research and a recommended ordinance are included in the attached study.

The Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on May 4, 2012 at which 30 people spoke. In addition, 150 letters or emails were also received.

Overview of Study Recommendations

An ordinance is proposed (Attachment A) that would:

- Establish a Student Housing Neighborhood Impact Overlay District, which is slightly larger than the moratorium area (see Figure 2, p. 7 of study);

- Define a student dwelling as a one or two-family dwelling requiring a certificate of occupancy in which at least one unit is occupied by 3 or more students (student is defined in the ordinance); and
- Require a minimum distance between student dwellings of 150 feet.

Existing student dwellings could remain, but new student dwellings would be required to be at least 150 feet (lot line to lot line) from any existing student dwelling. This minimum distance separation requirement would substantially limit any new student dwellings within the overlay district. Restrictions would apply to rentals to students (as defined by the ordinance) only; rentals to non-students would not be restricted.

In addition to the ordinance, the zoning study recommends a broad range of potential additional approaches which could prevent or mitigate the negative impacts of student housing on residential neighborhoods. These additional approaches should be considered in addition to the ordinance. Three that the Neighborhood Committee is recommending be specifically highlighted include:

- Strongly encourage the University of St. Thomas (UST) to build more on-campus housing as planned and approved as part of its 2004 conditional use permit amendments. Also, encourage UST to consider requiring first and second year students to live on campus. Freshmen and sophomores have been found to be associated with a higher rate of behavior-related neighborhood disturbances. Many schools require on-campus residency for first-year students, and provide residential supervision for all underclassmen living on campus.
- Conduct a small area planning or district plan amendment process in the moratorium area, including a 40-acre study, to examine current zoning vis-à-vis the Comprehensive Plan and identify opportunities appropriate for zoning for multifamily housing.
- Explore the establishment of a neighborhood conservation district that would put in place tools and regulations to encourage the preservation of the moratorium area's generally high-quality, historic housing stock.

Timeline and Schedule

The moratorium expires on August 11, 2012. A new ordinance needs to become effective on August 12th at the latest. Ordinances become effective 30 days after publication in the Legal Ledger. In order to meet this timeline, the City Council should approve any final ordinance on June 27th. A Planning Commission decision on June 1st would be timely to transmit the Planning Commission's recommendation prior to the first of the required four ordinance readings that will begin on June 6th.

Committee Recommendation

The Neighborhood Committee recommends that the Planning Commission approve the study, including the ordinance, and recommend them to the Mayor and City Council.

Questions may be directed to Josh Williams at josh.williams@ci.stpaul.mn.us or 651-266-6659.