

Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)

From: Anne Geisser <ageisser@umn.edu>
Sent: Friday, April 24, 2020 1:32 PM
To: Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)
Subject: Proposed development: 1769 Grand Avenue
Attachments: Grand Ave BZA 42420.docx

Think Before You Click: This email originated outside our organization.

TO:
Matthew Graybar

FROM:
Anne Geisser

DATE:
April 24, 2020

RE:
1769 Grand Avenue Proposal

I am sending our statement to you as an attachment. I want to alert you that my pages will be out of order. There are six pages and pages 1 and 2 will arrive as 5 and 6.

If you need any additional information, please contact me on behalf of the neighbors on Summit Avenue.

I submitted a list of the neighbors but was unable to get signatures, which I explain on Page 1. If you need them, I could get each person to send you an email affirming their participation in this statement. Please let me know if what I've submitted is sufficient.

I've never participated in an online meeting. Do I just put in the web address, listed on the letter you sent, on my computer? As far as participating—Do I just call one of the phone numbers at 3:00 pm when I will be given instructions for speaking? Will the agenda for the meeting be printed on the website? There are people who are working and might be able to participate if they have a better idea as to where this case will be heard on the agenda.

Sorry to be asking you so many questions, but I want to be sure to give those interested or able to participate the correct information.

Thank you so much for all of your help during this process.

TO: Board of Zoning Appeals
Matthew Graybar

FROM: All of the current neighbors on the south side of Summit
Avenue: Fairview to Wheeler

DATE: April 24, 2020

RE: Proposed Development: 1759 Grand Avenue

We have listed all of our names and addresses below. Due to the state order to shelter in place, I was unable to get the signatures of these home owners. However, we have been in continuous contact through telephone, texts, and emails. Everyone listed has a copy of this statement.

Suzi Scott	1740 Summit Avenue
Dan Scott	
Melinda Aljabry	1750 Summit Avenue
Naji Aljabry	
Debra Asplund	1760 Summit Avenue
Paul Padratzig	
Anne Geisser	1770 Summit Avenue
Cathy Messina	1774 Summit Avenue
Rick Messina	
Mari Ampe	1788 Summit Avenue

Bob Schestak
Linda Flatten 1812 Summit Avenue
Rob Redenbaugh
Bill Long 1818 Summit Avenue

We are very concerned about this mutli-plex structure that has been proposed to replace the duplex at 1769 Grand. We had hoped to present our observations, opinions and questions to the District Council at the Housing and Land Use Committee having submitted our written comments to the members of the Committee. We expected that it would be the basis for a discussion after the property owner presented his plan and answered questions from the Committee. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. This session was conducted through Zoom so the format was certainly not like being present for a public hearing. There were at least six people present to speak if asked. After the Committee members finished their questioning of the applicant, we thought those of us who had submitted opposing views would then be asked to speak and take questions from the Committee. In fact, no mention was ever made that they had received letters with serious questions and doubts about this proposal. One of our neighbors was recognized but there was no follow up to his comments.

Therefore, we are very pleased to have the opportunity to put forward our case with you. Thank you.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT: 1769 GRAND AVENUE

Grand Avenue is a very special place with a unique history. Every block tells its own story. It started with a trolley line that brought the entire length of the avenue together. That was followed by a bus that continues to join the mix of single family homes, duplexes, multi-family units, and commerce. Each section evolved with its own characteristics and blend of housing and mixed use buildings. That is why in evaluating the proposed project—1769 Grand—one has to view it in the context of its entire block: Fairview to Wheeler.

Beyond the commercial development at the four corners of Fairview and Grand, both sides from Fairview to Wheeler are residential. The south side of this block contains individual houses and different sized multi-plex housing. The project in question is a duplex built in 1916 meaning it has seen and survived all changes in over 100 years. During the 1960's apartment houses were built on this block leaving the duplex on a small lot in the middle of the block. The first question to be asked is why is the duplex not being maintained and instead being demolished?

We've been asked to review and assess if the new project fits this block on Grand Avenue. It also needs to be reviewed in the context of its new zoning code of RM2 which we believe is not the proper zoning for Grand Avenue as a whole and this block specifically. The new categories are RM1—low-density multiple residential district; RM2—medium-density multiple family residential district; RM3—high-density multiple family residential district. We believe a 5-story building should be relegated to RM3 districts. It is too large for RM2, especially on this block of Grand.

We view this proposed project for 1769 Grand as infill housing. The objective of infill housing is to fit into the block it wants to join, not to disrupt it. The proposed building is not consistent with the look of this block. It is very clear in reading the zoning code and the District's own plans that any new development should conform and fit into its current character. Yet it is the

proposed building that will drastically change the look and feel of Grand Avenue...and not in a good way.

Every apartment and multi-plex on both sides (north and south) are 2 to 3-stories in height. There are no structures anywhere in the area that are higher than 3-stories. The rest of the north side of the block has been established for 50 years and the duplex has been part of this neighborhood. Fitting in also includes the setback from Grand Avenue which should be consistent with the other apartment buildings on the block.

The duplex sits on the smallest parcel of land on this block. That means that this proposed project will be sitting on the smallest parcel on the block. This lot barely meets the minimum requirements for a multi-plex yet the request is to build a 5-story (50 foot) multi-plex to house 35 bedrooms with a mix of 3 and 4 bedroom apartments. Some call this a dorm or student housing.

It is important to emphasize that the lot size is 50 ft x 201 ft. The proposed building is 38 ft wide and 90 ft deep leaving just 12 ft that the owner requests be split to 6 ft between each building. Its footprint is entirely too large for the space bringing the new structure literally face to face with the apartment complexes on both sides. Its design and size overwhelm and harm the two apartment buildings to its east and west.

Further, its height will cast shadows over the houses across the alley on Summit Avenue so that they will not see sun during the day during the winter. (The photographs that were submitted with the applications show this to be true.)

The proposal states that it will house 12 units. However, each of the 12 units will be comprised of 3 to 4 bedrooms making for a total of 35 bedrooms. That is far more than any of the other apartments on the block because those are 1 and 2 bedroom units. Based on the design of the individual units, more than one person could be sleeping per room thereby increasing the occupancy to over 35. This area has colleges nearby so the likelihood is that students will be the major tenants as is reflected in the other apartments on the block.

We believe what is underlying all of these zoning changes with less stringent requirements and assessments is the issue of density. The new formulas being used are increasing density in smaller spaces and lowering requirements for other specific situations. We are unaware of the academic research being done to warrant such changes. But it appears that there are more zoning codes allowing more people in less space. In light of today's health crisis when we are being asked to distance ourselves and allow more space between us, it seems counter intuitive to put more of us together in smaller living space.

Parking is a major and serious issue in this neighborhood. The rationale asking for a variance is not acceptable. It needs to be remembered that it is the 35 bedrooms that determine parking requirements not the 12 units. We question the new formula for lowering the number of parking spots required. As a duplex, only two spots were required and provided in the back of the house. This is already a heavily trafficked area with four apartment complexes providing rear parking requiring alley access which is shared with the homes on Summit Avenue. Overflow parking will be on Grand Avenue where the new tenants will have to compete with tenants from all of the apartments on both the north and south sides of Grand. A smaller development would require less parking. We do not support any variances for additional parking. Whatever is built must be designed so that all required parking is on the site.

With the challenges we have with parking in the winter, where are all of these extra cars going to park during snow emergencies? How will the snow in the parking lot be handled? Where will it go? It cannot be plowed into the alley.

Most of the residents living in these apartments now tend to be students. Most of these students have cars. The fact that a bus runs on Grand does not eliminate the fact that students want to have their own vehicles.

In addition, all of us who live on the south side of Summit Avenue hear cars at all hours, car alarms, loud music, deal with trash issues. There are a lot of students already living in the apartments so there is always a great deal of

foot traffic and bikers. There is a history of trespassing on private property, a lack of respect that many students bring to the neighborhood knowing that they are in temporary spaces.

There is also a lack of green space. In fact, the only open space on the north side of Grand are the trees and green space on that lot. Another issue that will require study is the matter of water management. There is already a problem with overflow from the alley onto Fairview. It is thought that adding another concrete parking area, along with eliminating the trees and grass will only make the matter worse.

In sum, we do not believe that a project of this size is suitable and comparable for the space. The design and size do not fit with the current appearance and feel of Grand Avenue and as an infill structure it must conform to what is already in place and in accordance with the District's own plans. We believe the variances should be denied.



H. & Val J. Rothschild, Inc.

PROFESSIONAL PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SINCE 1885

2040 Wilson Avenue - Suite 7, St. Paul, MN 55119 tel:(651) 222-8554; fax: 290-0989

To: City of St. Paul – Board of Zoning Appeals
Matthew.Graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Date: April 24, 2020

Subject: Proposed 1769 Grand Avenue Development - comments

From: Kennon V. Rothchild III, Chief Operations Officer
H & Val J Rothschild, Inc. – Property Managing Agent for Regency Apartments, 1775 Grand Ave.

Dear Members of the Board of the St. Paul Board of Zoning Appeals:

We are the Property Managers for Regency Apartments, 1775 Grand Avenue, the property immediately to the west of the proposed development noted above. As managers of Regency Apartments we are intimately acquainted with the issues of maintaining multi-family housing on this block of Grand Avenue. We therefore wish to express some issues and concerns we have with the proposed development, as to how it will affect our ability to properly maintain Regency Apartments, and the effect the proposed development might have on the value of our client's property.

While not inherently opposed to multi-family housing on the site, the size of the proposed development, and the required variances to effectuate the proposed development, would have a significant negative effect on 1) our ability to rent and maintain Regency Apartments; and 2) the livability of the surrounding neighborhood. Here are some of the issues:

Parking: There is no parking on Grand Avenue from 2am to 7am, so all parking for a property must be accommodated on that property, or reasonably close by. During winter, and particularly during snowfalls and snow removal, the parking situation worsens, as the snow must go somewhere, and necessarily on the owner's property. It is currently difficult to find parking along that stretch of Grand Avenue at its current density at most times of day; a significant increase in units in the area will only exacerbate the problem. At Regency Apartments, when we either have contractors working on improvements to Regency Apartments, or have needed or emergency maintenance work to do, parking is amongst our greatest difficulties. Finally, the current amount of vehicle traffic in the alleyway behind the properties has led to a terrible condition of the road bed there – additional traffic would only worsen that effect.

Effect on physical plant of Regency Apartments: The bulk and height of the proposed development is a significant concern. With the excessive lot coverage, again we are concerned about snow storage and removal. We are also concerned about the loss of permeable land, and the potential for damage to the garden-level apartments, due to lack of adequate consideration of water run-off. Additionally the bulk and the height of the proposed development will have a negative effect on the landscaping and greenspace of Regency Apartments. We know from our experience at other multi-family properties, that it is difficult to maintain greenery in heavily shaded areas, as well as control erosion due to diminished root retention. We are also concerned that with a building to the east of ours, towering two full stories higher, and so close, that our roof may be subject to damage due to blown or thrown objects from the proposed development's roof or windows.

Effect on livability and value of Regency Apartments: We are concerned that the proposed density, proposed height, and proposed lessening of the side yard setbacks, will have a significant negative effect on the quiet enjoyment of our tenants of their units. The increase of population density, and the decrease of separation of properties, will lead to a decrease of privacy, and an increase to noise and disturbances for our tenants and others in the neighborhood. Additionally, many of the people seeking an apartment at Regency Apartments cite the nature of the neighborhood, its sense of heritage, and its attractiveness, as reasons they wish to be

residents of the property. The current proposed development is significantly out-of-scale with the rest of the block, which will cause Regency Apartments and the surrounding neighborhood to seem less attractive, leading to more difficulty renting units, and in maintaining the rents at their current levels. This of course would have a diminishing effect on the value of the property as a whole, should our clients choose to sell it at some point in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. Should you wish further testimony from us concerning our experiences managing property on that block of Grand Avenue, we would be happy to provide such.

Respectfully Yours,

Ken Rothchild III
Chief Operations Officer
H & Val J Rothschild, Inc.
(651) 222-8554
Kvrothchild3@cs.com

Inquiries may also be addressed to Lisa Dack, Chief Operations Assistant, lisa@hvaljr.com

RE: DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 1769 GRAND AVENUE

The Summit Avenue Residential Preservation Association ("SARPA") Board of Directors has been made aware of the development plans for 1769 Grand Avenue as submitted by Good Timing, LLC of Minneapolis. As SARPA understands it, the proposed project replaces a 1916-era duplex with a five story (50 feet high), multi-family building with 12 units of three and four bedrooms each and no elevator. By the developer's own admission, the project is sited on a parcel of land "small relative to the neighborhood properties and many other RM2 parcels throughout the city." The project does not meet existing RM2 standards for side yard setbacks (nine feet), lot size minimum per unit (1500 square feet) and parking spaces, for which the developer is seeking significant variances.

SARPA's principle concern when reviewing projects such as this, is that any new development should fit into the cohesive fabric of our surrounding community and enhance the positive physical aspects of the place. We believe that's what the City's residential density and dimensional standards attempt to formalize, so such regulations should generally be adhered to. Certainly this project violates both City codes and the harmony and character of the local neighborhood. Grand Avenue is a loved and sustainable space because it represents the very best of density on a human scale - a bustling mixed use corridor that still feels like a village. By contrast this project proposes large institutional scale on a tiny lot. It certainly does not adhere to the character and proportions of the surrounding area. Among our specific objections are the following:

1. This will be by far the tallest building located on Grand Avenue in this part of St. Paul. Squashed between two 3-story multi-family buildings, it will be viewed as an "eye sore" at best and a "stiff middle finger" at worst. It is completely inconsistent with the visual rhythm of buildings and open spaces in this block.
2. The developer states that this project advances long term goals outlined in the Macalester-Groveland Community Plan by citing a few selected aspects of the Plan but fails to acknowledge Land Use 1.2 which clearly states:
"Maintain and/or enhance density (taller) development at the intersection of mixed-use corridors and lower density (shorter) development at mid-block of mixed use corridors".
This maximum height proposed for the project fails to meet this objective since it is sited in the middle of the block, NOT a commercial node.
3. The existing RM2 zoning code stipulates that starting just a half block further east, along Grand Avenue from Fairview to Cretin, building heights may not exceed four stories or 40 feet. How can a 50 ft. building in the middle of a block adjacent to that district be in harmony with the neighborhood? The only five story buildings anywhere nearby are the dormitories at Macalester College, all of which feature significant open space and much larger setbacks from the street and surrounding buildings. This project has none of that. As a minimum standard for this type of property and in this area, we believe the height of this building should not exceed four stories or 40 feet including the solar panels which are an

SARPA

SUMMIT AVENUE RESIDENTIAL PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

admirable energy source but add further height which the developer has apparently not considered when complying with the code.

4. The developer's artist rendition of the lot coverage clearly shows an adverse impact on the properties directly behind and adjacent to the proposed building. The proposed building is inappropriately high and close to neighboring buildings, which poses a fire safety risk and will reduce air flow, green space and access to the sun for all residents. It is possible to have a variety of home types, including the medium density, multi-family housing common on Grand Avenue without destroying the character of the block or the peace of the neighbors but this project as proposed fails in that regard.
5. We were dismayed to hear the developer admit that a messianic pursuit of density at all cost on a tiny lot means it's not possible to include an elevator in a 5-story building, clearly a discriminatory decision harmful to potential disabled and elderly residents or to anyone not privileged enough to be able to manage multiple floors of stairs for their daily living. The scale and density proposed is thus entirely unsuitable for this lot in a diverse neighborhood.

We strongly urge the BZA not to support the project as proposed. Specifically the request to reduce lot size minimum per unit from 1500 square feet by 634 square feet (42%) is egregious and should be denied. The developer readily admits that this much smaller unit per square foot does not currently exist anywhere on Grand Avenue. How can that be in harmony with the neighborhood? The request for a variance to reduce the side yard setbacks from nine to six feet should also be denied. This variance is needed to maximize absolutely the height and density on such a small lot but with no plan to accommodate an elevator and other accessible features for those requiring them as a result. St. Paul should not be pursuing such expansion of housing options only for the young and fit.

In summary, this project as proposed, clearly does not adhere to the scale, character, or diverse community fabric of this section of Grand Avenue or the surrounding area. The developer should demonstrate the same creativity and innovation sought in the building's materials, technologies and techniques to arrive at a building more appropriate in scale, density and accessibility for such a small lot and for the surrounding neighborhood.

Thank- you for the opportunity to provide input on this important matter.

Bob Morrison
President
Summit Avenue Residential Preservation Association (SARPA)
1649 Summit Avenue
St. Paul 55105

To: City of St. Paul – Board of Zoning Appeals
matthew.graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Date: 24 April, 2020

Subject: Proposed 1769 Grand Ave. Development – Adjacent Property Owner Comments

From: Bartlett Baker – 1775 Grand Ave., St. Paul, MN - Property Owner

Hello. Our family has owned the 18-unit, 3-storey apartment building at 1775 Grand Ave. immediately west of the proposed 1769 Grand Ave. development for many years. We wanted to share our observations and concerns regarding the proposed development. These comments were also shared with the Housing and Land Use Committee of the Macalester Groveland Neighborhood Council.

We are certainly not opposed to the redevelopment of the property and support the overall goals of the revised “RM” zoning, but are concerned that specific size and density of the proposed 1769 proposal significantly exceed the scale of adjacent rental and single/duplex home properties up and down Grand Ave. The site is currently zoned “RM-2 – Medium Density Multi-Family Residential”. We understand that the “RM” zoning is currently under review and the proposal utilizes some of the objectives and specifics of the zoning study that the Planning Commission reviewed in January 2020. However, we believe that the current proposal stretches the limits of what is appropriate on the small site – perhaps attempting to put the proverbial five pounds in a three-pound bag.

There has been an on-going challenge for many years to balance the interests of property owners and permanent residents in the area with the demand for student housing that supports nearby colleges and universities. On one hand, as a landlord, we certainly appreciate the high student demand for rental properties, on the other hand, in trying to be a good neighbor we want to manage the student renter issues - party noise, parking demand and general wear and tear on the properties and the neighborhood. It is a balancing act.

The 1769 Grand proposal indicates a total of 12 apartment units. At face value this may seem reasonable. The applicant has done a thorough comparative analysis of unit density with many neighboring multi-family apartments. However, unlike many of the adjacent apartments with studio, 1 and 2-bedroom units, the proposed floor plans show 3 and 4-bedroom units or 35 bedrooms. A hypothetical comparison of a 12-unit building with a mix of 1 and 2-bedroom units would have just 18 bedrooms.

The applicant has said that the unit layouts do not target any specific market group and that they hope to attract families with children, empty nesters and students. Looking at the floor plans and proposed rental rates makes this seem a bit disingenuous. The very small living/dining areas in each unit, lack of a play area and the rental rate of \$2,500 to \$3,400/month do not appear to be targeted at families. The lack of an elevator, the small living area, minimal bedroom sizes and lack of balconies will likely discourage empty nesters. The large units appear to be targeted at students. The floor plan layouts are similar to multi-level college dormitory “suite” configurations rather than typical market-rate rental units being built in the metro market. The per person rate for a renter paying their share (on a per bedroom basis) would be approx. \$840/month, probably in line with the student market. We certainly do not oppose student rentals, but the point is that this is a very dense bedroom/unit project on a small

lot. This in turns implies a higher number of occupants, intensity of use and parking demand than one would expect in a typical 12-unit apartment.

In light of these observations we would ask that you consider the following comments.

- **Grand Ave. Setback** – The proposal indicates that the front building setback will be 12'. It appears from the site plan the front façade extends beyond the face of most of the other building facades on the block. The City of St. Paul Zoning code (66.231) indicates that where 50% or more of the front footage of a block is built up new structures are to match the average setback of the existing structures on the block. I would recommend that this be required of the new proposal.
- **Building Height** – The proposal indicates that the new building height would be 50'. The zoning code allows a maximum of 50', but this is significantly out of scale with the other buildings on both sides of Grand Ave. for many blocks in both directions. My understanding is that immediately west of the site, between Fairview and Cretin, the maximum height has been limited to 4 stories and 40' on both sides of Grand. My recommendation would be to let the average building height of the block be the governing height for the new structure. With both the front façade setback and building height similar to the surrounding context the proposal would better match the existing scale of Grand Ave.
- **Side Yard Setback (Variance Request)** – The applicant is requesting a reduction of the side yard setback by 3' (from 9' to 6') on both the west and east side of the building. The floor plan shows first floor outdoor entrances on both sides. The combination of side entrances, access sidewalks, seasonal snow removal for egress, yard maintenance and effective site drainage makes the remaining 6' of side yard very tight. Also, the combination of the reduced side yard setbacks and additional building height dramatically reduce the access to light and air for residents within the proposed building and those to the east and west. I would recommend maintaining the 9' side yard setback, as outlined in the current zoning code, be maintained.
- **Parking Reduction (Variance Request)** – While the proposal includes just 12 rental units, the total number of bedrooms shown in the floor plans is 35. Housing developers typically wrestle with the parking ratios that they will provide based upon neighborhood walkability and available transit. However, with the large number of bedrooms, not typical in the market, a more sophisticated way of evaluating parking demand should include a review of parking stalls per bedroom. Examining apartment parking literature, including the ULI (Urban Land Institute), National Apartment Association, ITE and TOD (Transit Oriented Development) studies, one finds a range of guidelines, but even in urban, transit-oriented locations like Portland and downtown Denver (with immediate LRT and bus service), one finds the lowest empirical parking stall/bedroom ratio of .48 to .78. Using a 0.5 ratio for 35 bedrooms would suggest 17 parking stalls and using a 0.75 ratio would suggest 26 stalls. I would suggest that the 12-stall variance requested is not nearly adequate and will generate unintended on-street and/or alley parking issues for the surrounding area.

I hope these comments are helpful. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted, Bake Baker

Bartlett "Bake" Baker Jr., FAIA, LEED AP, NCARB
(612) 508-3691
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Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)

From: Winston Kaehler <winkaehler@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 18, 2020 6:35 PM
To: Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)
Subject: 1769 Grand Avenue requested variances

Think Before You Click: This email originated outside our organization.

I do not favor the variances requested for construction of a large apartment building at 1769 Grand Avenue. The area has already been overburdened with out-of-scale zoning uses that have been built with previous variances, and the requested variances for the proposed project will only exacerbate the problems caused by existing construction and variances allowed.

Winston Kaehler
1712 Palace Avenue
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651-699-4183