

Mauricio Ochoa

1239 Thomas Avenue
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Council Member Mitra Jalali Nelson,

My name is Mauricio Ochoa and I am writing in opposition of the proposed Taco Bell drive-thru development at the corner of Edmund Avenue and Snelling Avenue. I believe this auto-oriented proposed development is an insult to the years of community-led engagement conducted for the *Saint Paul for All 2040 Comprehensive Plan*, the *Snelling Station Area Plan*, and the *Hamline Midway Community Plan*. In addition to ignoring all the envisioning documents for this area, I also believe the Planning Commission was negligent in ignoring the Zoning Committee's denial recommendation and approving this development since it ignores basic St Paul Zoning Ordinances.

All the documents named above have Transit-Oriented Development and pedestrian friendly infrastructure as core pillars of their framework. The very first policy in the St Paul 2040 Plan states the city encourages transit supportive density along existing transit. The development is also located within a designated Neighborhood Node, which is described as a pedestrian friendly area that makes the city more walkable. The Snelling Station Area Plan envisions the "tremendous potential for evolving [Midway's] predominantly auto-dominated form into a model mixed-use urban format commercial center." The neighborhood plan has similar strong language in opposition to auto-oriented development in favor of pedestrian and bike friendly infrastructure. You can easily see evidence of the auto-oriented design from the floor plan that was submitted (see image below.) The main entrance faces the parking lot instead of the sidewalk. The pedestrian experience will be a large transformer and two service doors that will mainly be used for loading. The intersection is similarly ignored by placing storage and freezers at that location which will result in long expanses of blank walls. As a licensed architect, I can also assure you the 5 feet provided for the two token bike hitches are not usable without encroaching on the sidewalk. Drive thrus are the epitome of auto-oriented development. As a cyclist, I have been denied service at this drive thru because I don't have a motor vehicle. With the drive thru being the only option late at night, this development is not only unfriendly to non-drivers, it actively refuses to serve you unless you are driving a car. This is true for most drive-thrus in our city.

Not only does this development show contempt towards St Paul planning documents, it doesn't even meet basic zoning requirements. A requirement for granting a conditional use is that it is not detrimental to the existing character of the neighborhood. FAR requirements and parking requirements are established to provide a cohesive language throughout a district. As stated in the staff report, this development is woefully undersized and needlessly overparked. The FAR calculation shows that it is nearly 5 times smaller than the bare minimum (0.5 minimum- 0.11

proposed) and has 8 more parking spaces than the absolute maximum allowed. Remember, this suburban-like FAR is less than a ¼ mile from the best transit connected node outside of downtown. To justify this underutilization of space, the staff report simply states that although it will be non conforming, it does not increase from the present non conforming building. That is an incredibly low bar to set especially seeing that the city is granting them conditional use in return for absolutely nothing that improves the neighborhood.

As a community we have spent a lot of time and money in creating documents on how we envision our city and have spent large amounts of money to create transit infrastructure that supports this vision (\$1 billion for the Green Line, \$27 million for the A-line.) We've also elected council members and mayors that state transit and building community wealth as priorities. This development ignores these major investments and condemns the site for 50 more years of the same car oriented development that divides our neighborhood between the two sides of Highway 51. The Conditional Use Permit gives us the opportunity to demand more than the absolute minimum for this location. I would strongly encourage you to reverse the erroneous decision made by the Planning Commission and demand more from development in our neighborhoods.

Thanks for your consideration,

Mauricio Ochoa

