

Wade, Michael (CI-StPaul)

From: Pereira, Luis (CI-StPaul)
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 2:45 PM
To: Wade, Michael (CI-StPaul)
Subject: FW: Proposed Changes to Student Rental occupancy Limits

Did you get this?

From: Paul McCormick <mccor026@umn.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 2:17 PM
To: Pereira, Luis (CI-StPaul) <Luis.Pereira@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Subject: Proposed Changes to Student Rental occupancy Limits

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

Dear Ms Golemo

I am writing to request your help to keep the current limits on student rental limits in our neighborhood. While we can get weary with the decades-long effort to keep the neighborhood a balanced ,safe and growing community that is affordable to all , I believe the proposed changes to the student rental agreement are ill advised.

(see below)

My question has always been -What are examples of other neighborhoods faced with College/University proximity that have maintained affordable,mixed use ,safe, liveable neighborhoods.

I actually have come to the conclusion that we have one of the most successful examples.

If affordable housing is the main concern I would ask that other solutions (City subsidized housing programs)be considered.

No rationale to change current student renter limits: As you can read in the attached Planning Commission study, there are some good arguments for making a broader change to the zoning code, with its outdated definition of "family." However, undergraduate college students who rent housing for 1-2 years are not the kind of nontraditional family unit that the study was meant to address, and there is arguably no-good reason to apply the broader zoning change to student rentals within the Student Housing Overlay District.

The Student Housing Overlay District, an initiative of then councilman Russ Stark, was put into place in 2012 to stabilize housing stock in Merriam Park and Macalester Groveland. Many single-family homes around the University of St. Thomas were being converted to student rentals and there was real concern that a vibrant part of the city was slowly degrading into a Dinkytown environment, driving out long term renters and homeowners. We are grateful to the City for enacting this important zoning code provision, which remains an important tool we

rely on to keep our neighborhood strong. Increasing the number of undergraduate students who can live together in a rental house from four to six will undermine that and other shared goals.

• **Safety:** As many of us know, it takes care and money to keep these old houses in MacGroveland and Merriam Park in good shape. For that reason, it probably comes as no surprise that the student rentals in our neighborhood tend to be among the least well-maintained houses. That *can* translate to serious safety concerns for the students who live there, starting with a failure to properly install and maintain smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and sometimes with behavior that puts tenants at risk. Fortunately, no students have died in a student rental house fire since the tragic death of a UST sophomore in December 2010, which was thought to be caused by improperly disposed smoking materials. But just last weekend, an electrical fire broke out in a UST student rental because of space heaters. There were no injuries in this daytime fire, but the students and their families were shaken by the close call.

• **Neighborhood livability:** For folks living on blocks with many rental houses, the increase of two students per house would represent a nearly immediate 50% increase in residents, cars and in many instances, parties. One homeowner estimates this change would result an increase in 24 students on his block. That is a lot more students coming and going up and down the street at 2:00 a.m.

• **Affordability:** We have all read in recent years about the City's goals to increase housing density along transit corridors and also to improve the availability of affordable housing stock. But increasing the numbers of students living in rental houses in the neighborhood does not serve that goal. Does anyone really believe that rents will remain the same when a landlord can collect rent from six students instead of four?

WSNAC (the West Summit Neighborhood Advisory Committee) became aware of the Planning Commission's study and proposal in late January (well after the Planning Commission had taken public testimony). WSNAC voted at its February 9th meeting to oppose the proposed zoning code change. The majority of WSNAC voting members believe there is no rationale and no data to support the Planning Commission's decision to specifically include the Student Rental Overlay District in the change. In fact, the Planning Commission cited lack of data as one limitation to the study (p. 6). With many current realities impacting housing patterns in and around UST (construction of a new dorm, the new sophomores on campus housing requirement, recent and seemingly continuing construction of numerous private dorms, plus the COVID-19 pandemic-related effects of more couples and families seeking to buy or rent houses and fewer students currently renting in the neighborhood), there are housing data and patterns we would like to better understand before a change of this magnitude is hammered down on the near UST area.



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