

John Torres
407 Duke Street
St. Paul, MN 55102

City Council for the City of St. Paul
15 Kellogg Blvd. West, 310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102

October 19, 2020

RE: Public comment concerning 1493 Highland Pkwy. Hearing scheduled for October 21st, 2020 at 3:30pm. File# 20-080854 (ABZA 20-6).

Dear Members of the St. Paul City Council:

I write to you today as a concerned citizen of our fare city. An appeal to a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) decision is being brought before you concerning work being done in constructing a home at 1493 Highland Parkway. I strongly urge you to deny the appeal. If you thoroughly scrutinize related documentation and submissions concerning the matter you are receiving from the many opposed to what is transpiring at the property in question, I firmly believe you will conclude as I have that the requested variance would result in construction that would undermine many aspects of what we are fortunate to enjoy in our city and, also, that the appeal applicant has not been operating in good faith in presenting desired changes at the location for some time.

Over the course of its attempted construction, numerous misrepresentations have occurred with the property at 1493 Highland Parkway. Initially, the applicant proposed only an addition when trying to garner support for the project from neighbors but now claims "it was always a teardown." I have witnessed firsthand at a Highland District Council meeting last month with the applicant falsely stating there were several homes with attached garages on the block when there is actually only one and that property predates construction of the alley that runs behind homes there (What transpired at the meeting was, to say the least, off-putting concerning the inability of some of those opposed to the variance being allowed to be heard due to constant interruptions by the applicant that went unchecked and, thus, shut down any meaningful debate.). Also, neighbors were not alerted of the plan change from an addition to new construction by flyer drop less than one week prior to teardown work commencing and, even then, with build plans not easily discernible. Finally, and most egregious, is the level of lack of transparency in obtaining approval from the city. Missing permits and processes with city policy and procedure not being followed once the scope of the project grew to new construction were many; one example would be the demolition of a garage performed two weeks prior to the demolition permit even being granted. As it stands now, the planned home will strongly deviate from the rest of the homes on the block. Keep in mind that the applicant is in longtime builder, so lack of knowledge cannot be a defense in this matter but only lends for more suspicion of what one can only discern as a cavalier attitude to the St. Paul home building processes in place to create harmony, both physically in terms of appearance and

figuratively with goodwill in the community, when constructing a home within St. Paul neighborhoods.

Besides the more abstract problems that have arisen, there has been actual damage to surrounding properties. The property at 1485 Highland Parkway has suffered several issues during the digging up of the lot line that has created stability concerns and required metal support panel installation. Additionally, eight mature trees had roots exposed that may affect their longterm instability. At 1501 Highland Parkway, many of the same potential impacts have arisen as at 1485 Highland Parkway. There has also been significant damage to the alley in the way of cracks, rolling dips and concavity. At one point, a stop order was almost issued due to missing permits and processes for the new build but were resolved when the home owner (again, also the builder and architect) produced documents assuming full risk of the continued build without variances and other requirements in place.

My roots in St. Paul go back to the building of the railroad here, and I attended the same college in our city that my great grandfather attended. Visitors I have hosted always remark on how we should be proud of the preservation the city has accomplished in keeping neighborhood houses in harmony with one another, and it was a big reason I purchased my home here in 2003. Prior to purchasing my home, I have had the opportunity to live in numerous large cities across the country over the years. In instances such as the one being brought before you today, I have watched as some of these cities, slowly at first, allowed homes that did not match those around them to be built until it was too late to reverse course, and something deep and undefinable was undeniably lost forever.

I sincerely hope that the City Council will review the numerous documentation that has been presented by others in opposition to the build that provide ironclad evidence, *and* strong argument, to why current plans at 1493 Highland Parkway need to be strongly scrutinized and the BZA's denial for the variance stand. I have no doubt that you are hearing from what would constitute a chorus of community members opposed to many of ongoing changes at the property and can see that it is not just one or two neighbors as the home builder will lead you to believe. It may look like an isolated case, but that seems to always be the way neighborhoods become reshaped and ultimately lose what makes them special.

I thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Torres', written over a white background.

John Torres
Resident of St. Paul