

Dear Councilmember Stark,

By way of introduction, my name is Elizabeth Firestone, homeowner of the residence at 1834 Summit Ave (which is directly behind the Wells Fargo bank on Grand Ave). My husband, Eric, and I were just made aware via a letter hung on our door of the public hearing that will occur later today in regards to the West Grand Zoning Study. As someone who will be directly affected by any rezoning changes, I will do my best to attend to voice my opinion on this matter but wanted to pass along our concerns via email in case I am unable to join.

As residents of the Grand-Summit area for the past ~10 years, we have enjoyed the charm, friendliness, and diversity of the area. When we moved from Wisconsin to Minnesota, one of the reasons that drew us to this area was its resemblance to Lake Drive in the Milwaukee-area, which has the similar “stately” street and the surrounding small shops and quaint neighborhoods of beautiful old homes. To my recollection, there rarely is a commercial and/or multi-residential building above 2-2 ½ stories in sight.

I was alarmed to find out that the city zoning committee is in the process of approving a measure to re-zone to allow buildings that will tower over all of the other buildings in the area. I read in the letter that I received on our door, and very quickly through items on the website (so my apologies in advance for anything that I may have misinterpreted and/or not stated correctly!), that buildings as tall as 55-feet could be built in our West Grand Ave neighborhood and that this type of development does not exist anywhere else on Grand Ave. Though new residential units may provide some benefits, perhaps such as increasing the city’s tax base and/or revenue for the developer, I feel that this measure will hurt the residents and homeowners throughout the area as well as those who travel to this area to enjoy the ambiance of the shops on Grand Ave and/or the walk up-and-down Summit Ave.

For as long as I have been here, this city has always had a reputation for being quaint and friendly due to our beautiful Grand/Summit area. However, I fear that large, residential buildings will diminish this beauty and take away from those homeowners like myself who thrive on the splendor and charm and tall trees and mature landscaping (and appreciate the lack of tall structures, dorm-like spaces, and cookie-cutter, new buildings!).

The height of the proposed rezoning and the setback from the streets and alleys are my biggest concerns. I propose the city limit the height of the buildings (to even less than the 40-feet that I have read on the website although I think that I saw 50-feet still mentioned) and increase the setback from the streets and the alleys even further than mentioned. I think this would most importantly preserve the beauty, quaintness and ambiance of our neighborhood in addition to limiting the congestion and parking limitations of this area.

I would be happy to share any additional concerns that I have about this project should it be of interest to you or any of the other city council members on the city zoning board.

As much as I enjoy this part of the city, we will most definitely be looking to move (most likely to Minneapolis) should the zoning changes allow such large, overpowering buildings that will destroy the historical ambiance that we so much enjoy.

With kind regards,
Elizabeth (and Eric) Firestone