

Shari Moore - a letter in support of rezoning

From: Nate Patrin <natepatrin@gmail.com>
To: <lucy.thompson@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Date: 9/4/2011 3:51 PM
Subject: a letter in support of rezoning

Dear City Council Representative,

As a relative newcomer to the Uppertown neighborhood, I've quickly grown to appreciate the surroundings and the community I plan to become an integral part of over the years. My parents, who have lived here for about a decade, have watched the area progress into the place it is now, a vital type of neighborhood that feels central to a big-city way of life yet allows plenty of room for small businesses, longtime residents and local institutions to thrive and serve the community, regardless of income level. It's also the same part of town that my French-Canadian and Metis fur trader ancestors plied their trade during 19th-century territorial days, so I have a bit of heritage at stake here as well. It was with my parents' encouragement that I moved here, and so far I'm happy to report that taking their advice has turned out for the better.

However, I recognize that there are some aspects of the neighborhood that could stand to be improved -- neglected or vacant houses shoddily maintained by absentee landlords, empty parcels of land going to waste, and tentative business plans that seem to be aimed more towards big-box sprawl than maintaining local character. I walk down Smith from McBoal to Grand in the morning on my way to the bus stop to go to work, and it's a gruesome sight: boarded-up, bombed-out houses, vacant lots filled with debris and overgrowth, and the unwelcoming husk of the now-abandoned Mobil station. With this neglect on the part of the current property owners, people passing through may feel that this stretch of space is not worth preserving or even considering part of a place where a community actually exists. In some cases, this merely means that they smash their liquor bottles on the sidewalk or huck their garbage in the street, where it goes uncleaned for days on end. In more unfortunate cases, it makes the area feel like a no-man's-land that provides opportunities for crime, such as we discovered earlier this spring when a man was stabbed during an attempted carjacking at the aforementioned Mobil station.

I believe that the people who live and work in this corner of Uppertown are decent people, and whether they live in the affordable housing up at Sherman-Forbes or in one of the painstakingly restored historic houses near Irvine Park, they stand to benefit from a rezoning plan that places more emphasis on modest-scale, mixed-use housing and retail. We've seen what happens when landowners sit on their hands hoping for profit-maximizing deals that haven't arrived after years of waiting -- and what happens is blight. A neighborhood like this can survive without massive tire-store garages and construction firm headquarters, but it doesn't meet its full potential when the parcels of land those places used to occupy are being left to rot. And between the workers at United and the crowds that come in during event nights at the Xcel, there are even more people from outside the community that are left to deal with these same problems in passing. I want this neighborhood to be welcoming to these people, too, and if we encourage a more human-scale retail and residential growth through this rezoning effort, it can only help bring further income into the area.

I plan on staying in my new home for quite some time -- I see this as a neighborhood on the rise, but with a focus on meeting the needs of a wide-ranging cross-section of people rather than just across-the-board gentrification. And I believe that this rezoning effort will bring focus back to maintaining the integrity of the neighborhood instead of just letting an apathetic status quo leave scars of urban blight strewn across an otherwise vibrant, historic part of town. I hope and trust you will listen to the concerns of your constituents.

Sincerely,

Nate Patrin

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Nate Patrin