

## Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)

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**From:** Jennifer Lacey <jenn\_lacey@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, September 11, 2020 5:09 PM  
**To:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)  
**Subject:** 542 Portland Ave

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

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

To the Department of Safety and Inspections,

We are writing to express our objection to the proposed triplex addition to 542 Portland and the five variances requested. We are unable to attend the meeting at the proposed time, therefore we wanted to share our thoughts in writing.

Our reasons for opposing the variances are as follows:

- Parking: The city has already granted a parking variance to the women's recovery home located at 533 Portland. With the additional cars already crowded our single sided parking street, the extra residences without adequate parking would cause undue stress on an already very challenging situation.
- The lack of outdoor space proposed means that the entire lot would be building or parking. This much non-permeable surface is not good for the community or the environment.

Our hope is that the city will consider the needs of the current residences surrounding this project and our community as a whole.

Thank you for kind consideration of this matter

Sincerely

Jennifer & Martin Lacey  
541 Portland Ave

September 15, 2020

536 Portland  
St. Paul, Mn.  
55102

Dear Sirs:

My husband and I are an elderly couple living in a single residence at 536 Portland, St Paul Mn. We bought our home in 1977.

We share a driveway with a triplex (542 Portland) directly west of us and also with (528/530 Portland) directly east of us. We are fortunate to have a 2 1/2 car garage (only have one car) at the end of our property. The triplex, to the west of us, has a lot behind their triplex for their rental cars. The property to the East has a 2 car garage (528-530 Portland).

We are concerned over the property owner of 542 Portland & Sullivan Property Investments 11 LLC (P.O. Box 50658)

Mendota, Mn. 55150, 1430

plan to build a triplex in that property's backyard. We feel that would very negatively affect our ability to realize a decent price when we decide to sell our home.

What can we do about this? Do you have any suggestions how we can circumvent this?

This is very worrisome to us. Any help you  
can give us would be gratefully accepted.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Currie

P.S. Telephone 651-224-0084  
We do not have a computer.

Address:

Gary & Elizabeth Currie  
536 Portland  
St. Paul, Mn. 55102

Attached are comments from the two of us regarding the proposed 540 Portland project. Asking that you include them with the variance request.

Thank you,

Dan Chouinard and John Sularz

550 Portland Avenue

John Sularz & Dan Chouinard  
550 Portland Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55102

September 30, 2020

Matthew Graybar  
Zoning Inspector III  
Department of Safety and Inspections  
375 Jackson Street, Suite 220  
Saint Paul, MN 55101

**RE: Proposed Second Triplex Development at 540 Portland Avenue**

To whom it may concern:

As residents of Portland Avenue who moved into the Historic Hill District neighborhood seven years ago, we have seen numerous improvements in the houses on our street. Several formerly stressed properties have been spruced up or meticulously restored. So we are distressed to see, at this late date in the process, plans for this proposed housing development at 540 Portland Avenue which will take our neighborhood in the wrong direction.

We strongly oppose the current design of this project for these reasons:

- **Development is substantially outsized for both property and location in neighborhood.**
  - It is clear from the unusually large number and the extremity of variances being requested that this development is outsized for its location on the lot and in relation to the surrounding buildings.
  - *Implication: Allowing this project to proceed would negatively impact the neighborhood, and would set a precedent for other outsized properties to be built within the neighborhood.*
  
- **Development design oriented toward Summit Avenue is detrimental to neighborhood cohesion on several counts:**
  - Oriented to Summit but not a Summit property. The development is not located on Summit Avenue but acts as if it is. This proposed development with a Portland address faces away from Portland and fronts directly on the rear lot line of its Summit Avenue neighbor.
  - Current 540 Portland owner has no control over Summit owner's use of land directly in "front" of proposed development. Currently, there is lawn furniture and trees/shrubs on the Summit property that would block the view of this new triplex from Summit. Current designs which show it having a clear view of Summit are misleading. The owner of the Summit property could build a fence, plant trees, build a small building in front of this development and block the view.
  - Placement of development in middle of the block contributes to congested and incohesive look. The proposed development exhibits none of the characteristics of typical backyard buildings—carriage houses and garages—of this neighborhood. Its

false-front orientation to Summit Avenue creates aesthetic confusion at least, and the possibility of real danger at worst, in the event that emergency responders arriving at the building find no access from Summit and no clearly defined entrance on Portland Avenue.

- ***Implication: Orienting the development toward Summit will not harmonize with surrounding buildings and will compromise, rather than enhance, the general look and appeal of Summit Avenue and the block as a whole.***
- **This proposed development will significantly exacerbate an already stressed on-street parking situation.**
  - The lack of on-street parking is a well-known and longstanding issue on Portland Avenue where parking is only allowed on one side of the street. No variance should be considered.
  - The proposed hydraulic lifts in the garage of the new development look good on paper, but the reality of coordinating moving cars in and out of the garage will be problematic for most people. In all likelihood, people will simply park on the street instead of coordinating moving cars up and down on the lift every morning and evening.
  - ***Implication: This proposed project would make inadequate on-street parking for current residents in our neighborhood worse instead of better.***
- **Lack of green space on new property brings water management issues, as well as aesthetic concerns.**
  - Except for a small strip of grass on the building's periphery, plans call for a massive structure and hardscaping over nearly all the remaining property.
  - ***Implication: Rainwater management and environmental concerns, as well as aesthetic issues, arise with this housing development and its parking lot.***
- **Neglect by current owner (property issues & lack of communication)**
  - Property issues (photos included at end of this document): There is significant erosion on either side of the front cement stairs, a significant portion of the boulevard is dirt (not grass), dirt covers at least half of the front sidewalk (which is muddy when it rains), poorly maintained rock area around tree on boulevard with haphazard placement of bricks, ill-maintained retaining wall and negligent snow removal in the winter. It is said that the greatest indicator of *future* performance is *past* performance, and this property owner clearly has an issue with keeping his property well-maintained. Architect Carlos Perez asserts that the property issues will be taken care of with the new project; however, they should have been taken care of years ago. The past and current inability to maintain the property is a clear warning that a potential new property will not be properly maintained.
  - Owner's lack of communication with neighbors: Mr. Perez states that an attempt was made to reach out to neighbors about the project months ago; however, news of the project came as a surprise to neighbors on Portland Avenue via a letter received on or about September 11, 2020 from the St. Paul BZA, not from the owner.

- ***Implication: Lack of communication with neighbors and poorly maintained property reinforce that this project is more of a revenue stream for the owner rather than an opportunity to be a good neighbor and contribute to the neighborhood with a design that enhances rather than overpowers its immediate surroundings.***

We would welcome the opportunity to continue this discussion. We know of no neighbors within the vicinity of the proposed housing development who support it in its current form.

Respectfully,

John Sularz & Dan Chouinard

Enclosure: Photos of 540 Portland Avenue property and Summit Avenue property



**540 Portland Avenue:**  
Poorly maintained  
boulevard.

Top photo shows erosion  
of boulevard dirt into the  
street.

Bottom photo shows  
close up of poorly  
maintained brick  
surround at base of tree,  
as well as erosion in front  
yard.







**540 Portland Avenue:**  
Significant erosion in  
front yard.

Top photo shows erosion  
on either side of front  
stairs, with dirt spreading  
onto sidewalk.

Bottom photo shows  
sidewalk covered in dirt  
due to erosion. It has  
been like this for years.





**View of 540 Portland Avenue property from Summit Avenue:**

Top photo shows distant view of property line (where the fence is currently located).

Bottom photo shows close up of Summit owner's patio furniture, trees and shrubs (some located on Summit property).



## Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)

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**From:** Gar Hargens <gar@closearchitects.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 30, 2020 9:11 AM  
**To:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)  
**Cc:** martinslacey@gmail.com; Ann Schroder And Nick Marcucci; Claire Wahmanholm; Dan Roth; Daniel Chouinard; Daniel Lupton; Elena Esters; Jason Patalonis; John Sularz; Laura Kindseth; Mary Wiley; Mason Riddle (masonriddle@mac.com); Missy Thompson; Patty Voje; Sam Isaacson; Simon Jette-Nantel; WENDY SURPRISE; timcathymaes@gmail.com; Emilia; Gause, George (CI-StPaul); cathy maes; Gar Hargens  
**Subject:** Re: Comments on Requested Variance for 540 Portland Avenue  
**Attachments:** 542 Portland!.docx

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

Hi Matt,

Please find below Missy's and my comments about the proposed variances. Please let us know if you have any questions. We intend to be on the call Monday but, as you requested, we will only offer any new material we might have.

Thanks!

# Gar

Gar Hargens AIA, NCARB  
President/Owner  
Close Associates Incorporated, Architects  
612-339-0979 office and cell  
[gar@closearchitects.com](mailto:gar@closearchitects.com)  
close [architects.com](http://architects.com)  
3101 East Franklin Avenue  
Mpls., 55406

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS, City of Saint Paul  
9/29/2020

File #: 20-069819, 540 Portland Avenue

Comments about Requested Variances:

1. Primary Entrance to rear: Placing the primary entrance at the rear is part of the applicant's attempt to pretend that this project belongs on Summit Avenue. It will have no front yard, sidewalk, or driveway on Summit as is the existing pattern throughout this and most residential neighborhoods. Finding a main entrance for guests or deliveries to these three units will be further complicated by a Portland facing elevation with no people doors, only garages.
2. 10 off-street parking spaces required: The ten residential units to the West of this property (townhouses and condos) do not have off street parking and, with no alley, no ability to add it. Street parking on this section of Portland Avenue has been a severe problem for many years. We cannot condone a project that will add, not help solve this problem. The project appears to be too large given its parking demands. In addition, there is no space designated for snow storage. That or a guaranteed plan for snow removal should be included.
3. 35% lot coverage: In a location typically occupied by garages and carriage houses, this building will simply be too large and visually overwhelm its neighbors.
4. RT2 lot size per unit: Again, the request of the variance is an indication of how oversized this proposal is.
5. Minimum lot width: The number of units and their design creates this need for a variance. Other design solutions and a smaller scale development should be recommended.

6. Minimum rear yard setback: Repeat comments for variances 1 & 5. A different site plan and forgoing the "Summit Avenue address" (desire to be "on" Summit) would let this building meet the twenty five foot requirement.

Additional Comments:

1. In the past, designers and developers have been encouraged to treat variances as a last resort. They might request one after trying in every way make their project(s) succeed within Zoning and Building Code requirements,. "Hardship" was the case to be made to Zoning Officials in both Cities. There is no hardship here, just a wish to go way beyond what Code has specified.
2. In granting such a sweeping list of exceptions (variances), and allowing a highly unusual development to occur, a dangerous precedent may be set for other developers who are not particularly interested in becoming new/good neighbors.
3. Access to this triplex from Portland is by a narrow driveway that is by shared easement. The other party in the easement was never contacted by the developer (until we raised the alarm last week) to discuss the impact all this new traffic might have on them. Their home is a few feet away from the drive. Also, the driveway will be the only access to the triplex units. All foot traffic from deliveries, visitors, etc. will also necessarily enter the site up this narrow route.
4. Placing this large "house" so close to Summit Avenue may limit the options of the owner on Summit to the East. Has that owner been informed of these plans? We understand they reside out of the Country.

Respectfully submitted by Missy Staples Thompson and Gar Hargens, twenty five year residents at 548 Portland Avenue.

## Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)

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**From:** Ann Schroder/Nick Marcucci <alsnjm@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 30, 2020 10:57 AM  
**To:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)  
**Cc:** Gar Hargens; martinslacey@gmail.com; Claire Wahmanholm; Dan Roth; Daniel Chouinard; Daniel Lupton; Elena Esters; Jason Patalonis; John Sularz; Laura Kindseth; Mary Wiley; Mason Riddle (masonriddle@mac.com); Missy Thompson; Patty Voje; Sam Isaacson; Simon Jette-Nantel; WENDY SURPRISE; timcathymaes@gmail.com; Emilia; Gause, George (CI-StPaul)  
**Subject:** Re: Comments on Requested Variance for 540 Portland Avenue

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Matthew

I would like to express my agreement with Gar and Missy's comments. I am an architect with 37 years experience and have asked for variances in the past throughout the Twin Cities but everytime it has been a request regarding one issue. I think that asking for 6 variances only proves that this proposal is out of scale for this parcel of land and it's placement on the site. Please include this email in with the variance request.

Nick Marcucci/Ann Schroder  
552 Portland

On Wed, Sep 30, 2020 at 9:15 AM Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul) <[Matthew.Graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:Matthew.Graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us)> wrote:

Good Morning Gar,

Thank you for your statement. I will include it with the applicant's variance request.

Respectfully,



**Matthew Graybar**  
*Zoning Inspector III*  
Department of Safety and Inspections  
375 Jackson Street, Suite 220  
Saint Paul, MN 55101

P: 651-266-9080

F: 651-266-9009

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City in America



[matthew.graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:matthew.graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us)

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Need assistance resolving a property issue with a resident or landlord?

Call the Dispute Resolution Center: <http://disputeresolutioncenter.org/> 651-292-7791

**There is FREE PARKING at our office located at 375 Jackson Street. Just tell the guard you're here for an appointment!**

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**From:** Gar Hargens <[gar@closearchitects.com](mailto:gar@closearchitects.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 30, 2020 9:11 AM  
**To:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul) <[Matthew.Graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:Matthew.Graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us)>  
**Cc:** [martinslacey@gmail.com](mailto:martinslacey@gmail.com); Ann Schroder And Nick Marcucci <[alsnjm@gmail.com](mailto:alsnjm@gmail.com)>; Claire Wahmanholm <[wahmanholm@gmail.com](mailto:wahmanholm@gmail.com)>; Dan Roth <[DAN@voxcreativeinc.com](mailto:DAN@voxcreativeinc.com)>; Daniel Chouinard <[danchoui@icloud.com](mailto:danchoui@icloud.com)>; Daniel Lupton <[danlupton@gmail.com](mailto:danlupton@gmail.com)>; Elena Esters <[elena@foxhomes.com](mailto:elena@foxhomes.com)>; Jason Patalonis <[jtpatalonis@earthlink.net](mailto:jtpatalonis@earthlink.net)>; John Sularz <[J\\_sularz@hotmail.com](mailto:J_sularz@hotmail.com)>; Laura Kindseth <[reallife2@msn.com](mailto:reallife2@msn.com)>; Mary Wiley <[mary.wiley@rsmus.com](mailto:mary.wiley@rsmus.com)>; Mason Riddle ([masonriddle@mac.com](mailto:masonriddle@mac.com)) <[masonriddle@mac.com](mailto:masonriddle@mac.com)>; Missy Thompson <[missy.staples.thompson@gmail.com](mailto:missy.staples.thompson@gmail.com)>; Patty Voje <[patty@spotcreates.com](mailto:patty@spotcreates.com)>; Sam Isaacson <[sam@foxhomes.com](mailto:sam@foxhomes.com)>; Simon Jette-Nantel <[sjettenantel@gmail.com](mailto:sjettenantel@gmail.com)>; WENDY SURPRISE <[wendysurprise28@gmail.com](mailto:wendysurprise28@gmail.com)>; [timcathymaes@gmail.com](mailto:timcathymaes@gmail.com); Emilia <[curls3645@gmail.com](mailto:curls3645@gmail.com)>; Gause, George (CI-StPaul) <[George.Gause@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:George.Gause@ci.stpaul.mn.us)>; cathy maes <[timcathymaes@gmail.com](mailto:timcathymaes@gmail.com)>; Gar Hargens <[gar@closearchitects.com](mailto:gar@closearchitects.com)>  
**Subject:** Re: Comments on Requested Variance for 540 Portland Avenue

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Thanks!

# Gar

Gar Hargens AIA, NCARB

President/Owner

Close Associates Incorporated, Architects

612-339-0979 office and cell

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close [closearchitects.com](http://closearchitects.com)

3101 East Franklin Avenue

Mpls., 55406



**Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)**

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**From:** Wiley, Mary <Mary.Wiley@rsmus.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 2, 2020 8:49 AM  
**To:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)  
**Subject:** Comments on requested variance for 540 Portland

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

Hello Matthew,

I am sending this to you on behalf of my mother, June Nelson, who resides at 544 Portland, #1.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

*To whom it may concern,*

*My name is June Nelson and I have lived at 544 Portland Avenue since 1985. Our building was designed by the renowned architect, Clarence Johnston, in 1885. The building has survived pretty much unaltered and has maintained its architectural integrity.*

*The triplex proposed next door will be on a lot that is too small to accommodate an additional building population and parking. This is inappropriate and poses a problem for the neighbors and a threat to the historic area.*

*There is an immediate problem today. A retaining wall between 542 and 544 needs repair badly. It has been deteriorating and is leaning into 544 property. The owner of 542 has made no effort to repair it and is aware of the problem.*

*Please do not allow the building at 542. It would threaten our quality of life and historic area.*

*Kind regards, June Nelson*

**Mary M. Wiley**  
IT Program Director

**RSM US LLP**  
801 Nicollet Mall, Suite 1100, Minneapolis, MN 55402  
M: 612.840.9781 E: [mary.wiley@rsmus.com](mailto:mary.wiley@rsmus.com) | W: [www.rsmus.com](http://www.rsmus.com)



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## Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)

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**From:** Jason Patalonis <jtpatalonis@earthlink.net>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 2, 2020 12:40 PM  
**To:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)  
**Cc:** 'Ann Schroder & Nick Marcucci'; 'Gar Hargens'; martinslacey@gmail.com; 'Claire Wahmanholm'; 'Dan Roth'; 'Daniel Lupton'; 'Elena Esters'; 'John Sularz'; danchoui@icloud.com; 'Laura Kindseth'; 'Mary Wiley'; 'Mason Riddle'; 'Missy Thompson'; 'Patty Voje'; 'Sam Isaacson'; 'Simon Jette-Nantel'; 'WENDY SURPRISE'; timcathymaes@gmail.com; 'Emilia Mettenbrink'; Gause, George (CI-StPaul)  
**Subject:** RE: Comments on Requested Variance for 540 Portland Avenue

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

Matthew-

To be brief, I know you have received numerous comments about the proposed triplex at 540 Portland Avenue. I too want the record to show I am very opposed to this plan for ALL the reasons stated by Miss Thompson, Gar Hargens, Nick Marcucci, Ann Schroder, Martin and Jenn Lacey and most recently these well thought out comments from Dan Chouinard and John Sularz. I feel no further need to reiterate the same concerns, they are all too apparent.

I will state for the record that the lack of neighborhood feedback prior to the recent last minute announcement of the postponed hearing in late September sets a very bad precedent for the development process set in place by the city. Add to that the excessive variance requests and a design which only nods at period architecture while in reality more closely resembling a suburban attempt at Victorian design does not compliment the historic integrity of Ramsey Hill.

While I am not opposed to development, it must make sense. This proposal does not belong on Portland Avenue as it is currently designed.

Thank you for passing these comments on.

Jason Patalonis  
506 Portland Avenue

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**From:** Daniel Chouinard [mailto:danchoui@icloud.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 30, 2020 4:41 PM  
**To:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul) <Matthew.Graybar@ci.stpaul.mn.us>  
**Cc:** Dan Chouinard <danchoui@icloud.com>; Ann Schroder & Nick Marcucci <alsnjm@gmail.com>; Gar Hargens <gar@closearchitects.com>; martinslacey@gmail.com; Claire Wahmanholm <wahmanholm@gmail.com>; Dan Roth <DAN@voxcreativeinc.com>; Daniel Lupton <danlupton@gmail.com>; Elena Esters <elena@foxhomes.com>; Jason Patalonis <jtpatalonis@earthlink.net>; John Sularz <J\_sularz@hotmail.com>; Laura Kindseth <reallife2@msn.com>; Mary Wiley <mary.wiley@rsmus.com>; Mason Riddle (masonriddle@mac.com) <masonriddle@mac.com>; Missy Thompson <missy.staples.thompson@gmail.com>; Patty Voje <patty@spotcreates.com>; Sam Isaacson <sam@foxhomes.com>; Simon Jette-Nantel <sjettenantel@gmail.com>; WENDY SURPRISE <wendysurprise28@gmail.com>; timcathymaes@gmail.com; Emilia Mettenbrink <curls3645@gmail.com>; Gause, George (CI-StPaul) <George.Gause@ci.stpaul.mn.us>  
**Subject:** Re: Comments on Requested Variance for 540 Portland Avenue

Hello Matthew,

## Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul)

---

**From:** cathy maes <timcathymaes@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 2, 2020 1:41 PM  
**To:** Jason Patalonis  
**Cc:** Graybar, Matthew (CI-StPaul); Ann Schroder & Nick Marcucci; Gar Hargens; Martin Lacey; Claire Wahmanholm; Dan Roth; Daniel Lupton; Elena Esters; John Sularz; danchoui@icloud.com; Laura Kindseth; Mary Wiley; Mason Riddle; Missy Thompson; Patty Voje; Sam Isaacson; Simon Jette-Nantel; WENDY SURPRISE; Emilia Mettenbrink; Gause, George (CI-StPaul)  
**Subject:** Re: Comments on Requested Variance for 540 Portland Avenue

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Dear Matthew,

I too am opposed to the development as it is currently slated and designed. I believe that the volume of the triplex is far too massive and the extra variances added to the project says that it simply does not fit. I agree with all of the neighbors who have cited design issues and I applaud them for the time that they have put into this on short notice. That brings me to my second concern: *the process*. The project had a pre-application in February and then "popped up" fully developed without notice or neighborhood knowledge, this points to a flaw in the city's development and zoning system. One may state that the pandemic is to blame, I would think that during such a time an even higher level of communication is imperative.

I do not have a problem with density when it is done right. 540 Portland is a square peg trying to fit in a round hole too quickly.

Cathy Maes  
501 Portland Ave  
952.992.0000

On Fri, Oct 2, 2020 at 12:40 PM Jason Patalonis <[jtpatalonis@earthlink.net](mailto:jtpatalonis@earthlink.net)> wrote:

Matthew-

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