

Moore, Shari (CI-StPaul)

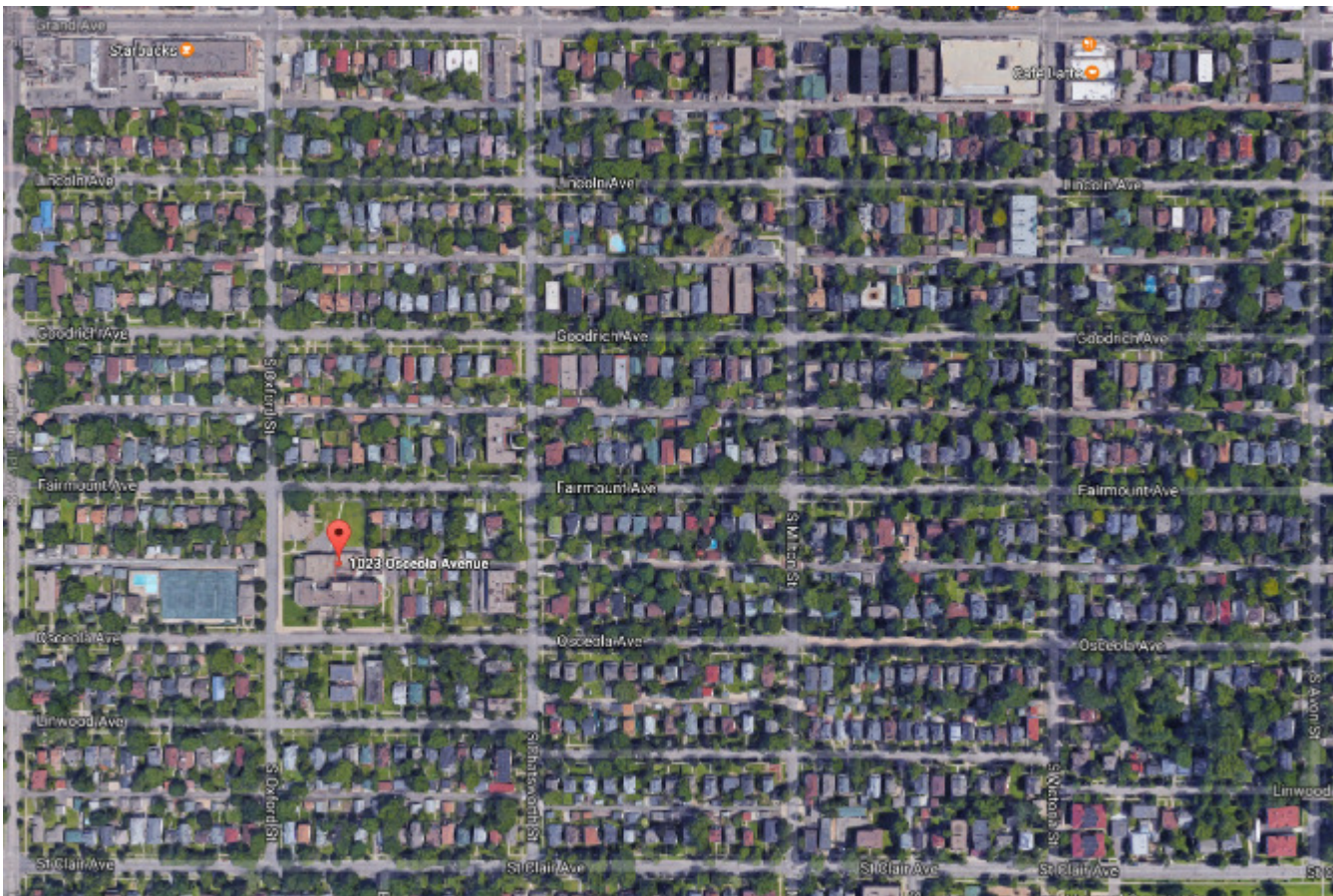
From: Kelly O'Kane <kellyokane@pobox.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 12, 2017 8:50 PM
To: *CI-StPaul_Contact-Council
Subject: BZA Appeal Feedback - City Council agenda item for April 19th

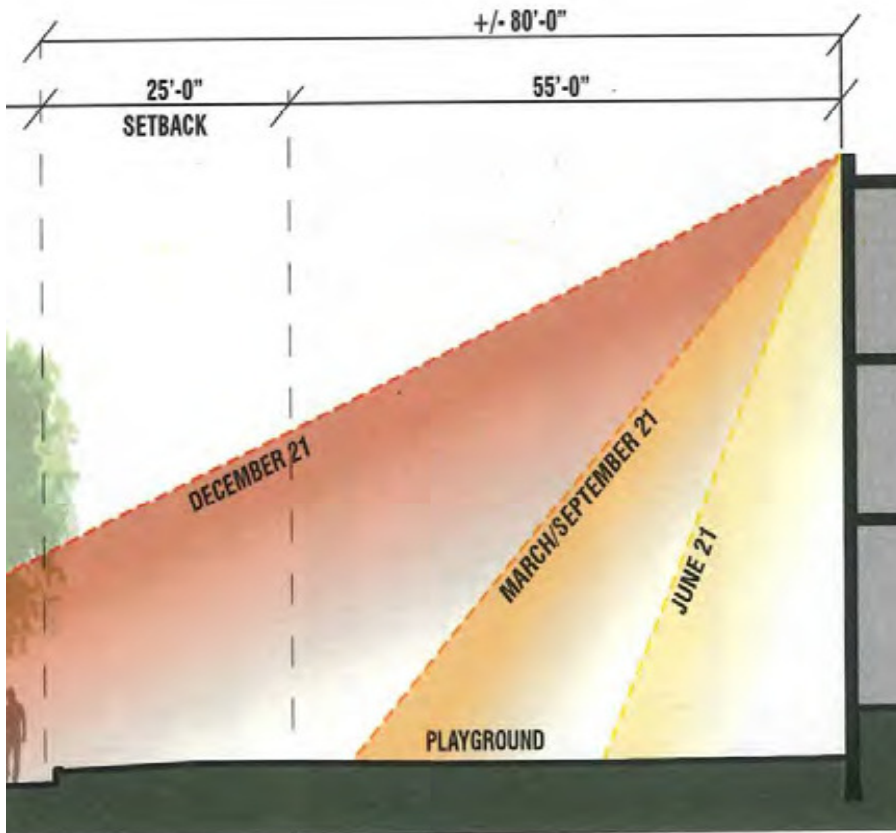
Dear Members of the Saint Paul City Council,

I am writing today to ask that you reverse the Board of Zoning Appeals decision to grant code variances for the expansion of the Linwood School, because I believe the City Council has a responsibility for the preservation of the historic Summit Hill neighborhood that the Board of Zoning Appeals does not.

I'm sure you will hear a great deal of statistics and numbers in this debate - I would alert you to be on the lookout for two numbers that you may hear that I believe disguise the true impact of this expansion.

1) The reduction of the open space on the north side of the School. This area will be reduced by 40%, and it is the last remaining open green space of this size in the neighborhood. You will hear that green space is only being reduced by 10% when counting all grounds around the school, but the truth is it is not possible for children to play baseball or football on a strip of grass adjoining the building, or in the middle of the new "tot park." Here is a map of the area, from St. Clair to Grand, and from Lexington to past Avon (the School is identified with the orange arrow - the top of the map is North).





As you can see, that green space north of the building is the only one of its kind, and 40% of it would be going away. You can also see that for young children who are permitted to go to a playground alone without crossing a major street such as Lexington, Grand, or St. Clair, this is their only playground. The picture to the right is from the City's own shadow study. And what kind of reduced playground are we left with? One that is in shadow the majority of the year - and more than 50% of the time September through March! Is this a "win" for the children who attend the school, or those that live in the neighborhood? Just as we have to advocate for the children who attend the School, we have to advocate for the children who live in the neighborhood. What are we to tell them? That for generations kids and their families learned to socialize and play together in a sunny playground that used to be here, and then we cut it in half and what's left is mostly in shade, but hey kid, that's progress?

2) The variance request for a 47' high structure. In most of the documents I have seen, the footprint variance request is stated as a percentage as it is about 10% over code, but the height variance request is stated as 17'. Sounds a lot better than 56% over code, doesn't it? Also, please look at the drawings of the proposed expansion from the perspective of the intersection of Fairmount and Oxford Avenues and note that there is a (approximate) five foot wall. (The wall exists now and continues to exist in the expansion plans).



This means if you are standing in this location, the top of a 47' tall building will be at least 52' above you.

Also, when the expansion plan was originally presented to the neighborhood, the variance request was for 50'. This was later changed to 47', and SPPS said this was an accommodation to neighborhood concerns. In fact, it was a correction to a mistake - that request should have always been for 47'. I mention this in case this reduction from 50 to 47 is again presented as an "accommodation."

The Comprehensive Plan Area Plan Summary for Summit Hill, amended and adopted by the City Council (2/15/06) provides the guidelines which the Council agrees to abide by with regard to neighborhood development. Repeatedly the Summit Hill Association (SHA) is called out as the City's partner in making recommendations to changes in the neighborhood, and the SHA has recommended denial of these variances. If the guidelines limit new commercial buildings to 30' and mixed use to 36' on Grand Avenue, how can they be ignored (by 56%) a few blocks away in the middle of 1 1/2 and 2 story homes? I think the Council must also consider if it grants these variances if it opens itself up to being challenged to grant similar variances in the future. I have attended a City Council meeting before where a Summit Hill property owner was denied permission to change an existing duplex into a triplex because of the historic nature of the neighborhood, and as far as outside appearances went, all he was doing was adding a door to the garden level of the building. Where would the equity be in denying that request but approving the halving of our one neighborhood playground?

Finally, as reported in the Saint Paul Pioneer Press on April 11th, the SPPS now expects to have 33,000 students by 2026, not the 38,200 by 2024 that was previously projected when this proposal was initiated. SPPS "Facilities Director Tom Parent said the board will consider revisions to the facilities master plan next month." From the short article, it is unclear whether this near 14% decrease in the population would affect the grade levels served at Linwood, but the question needs to be asked.

It saddens me greatly that the neighborhood I love has been unable to debate this proposal without the amount of vitriol that unfortunately seems to permeate our society today - I hope the children at the Linwood School are not being taught if you disagree with someone to ratchet up the anger and start name calling. I also want you to know that, without exception, every person I know who is against this proposal is a supporter of the Linwood School, and supportive of improvements to the School. It is our neighborhood school, and many of us either sent children there or attended school there. I want better classrooms, a new lunchroom, a new HVAC system, a separate gym, and a reasonable addition - you bet! And I'm happy to pay my taxes for them. I want the best for the kids who attend that school, but I also want the best for the kids who live in the neighborhood. I simply don't think this proposal accomplishes that, and I believe a better proposal could.

Wishing you the best in your deliberations,
 Kelly O'Kane
 1007 Linwood Avenue

