

January 4, 2015

RE: File # 14-355023

Property Address: 945 Grand Ave

Dear Yaya Diatta:

I am disappointed the variance for Rafic Chechouri, owner of Gerber Jewelers at 945 Grand Ave was denied. My husband and I have lived across the street at 940 Grand for 18 years. I have come to know Rafic and Summer Chechouri as neighbors and I would consider them friends. They are a wonderful asset to the neighborhood and to this community.

It is discouraging to hear about the denial for the improvement to their property. I have spoken to them, I have seen the drawings of their planned expansion to their property, I have been in their current retail store and I have been in their beautifully renovated living space at 945 Grand. What confuses me is why, in this economy, any State, County, City or Neighborhood Council would deny any small business the opportunity to grow, expand and prosper.

Grand Ave has changed greatly since I moved in to the neighborhood 20 years ago. Back then it was mainly all small businesses. Now it is a mix of small businesses and chain stores. The addition of the bigger retailers is vital to the continued growth and livelihood of our neighborhood. But without the continued presence of the small business Grand Ave will slowly turn into another Woodbury. My Husband purchased our home 18 years ago to open a small business. He has since closed his business, but we converted the property back into a single family home because we love this neighborhood and we wanted to continue to be a part of it. Mr. Chechouri plans to spend a sizable amount to expand and enhance his property. This will have a positive effect on his business and a positive effect on the neighborhood.

I cannot see one negative effect of their enhancements. Is parking the concern? I live across the street and it is not an issue on our block. It is a bigger issue on the block east of us, but that houses JCrew, Pottery Barn, Chipolte, Anthropology and they are all big retailers and they are allowed to have retail space to the sidewalk, which is crucial in the success of any retail store that relies on foot traffic. Is the concern that this enhancement will set precedence for other properties on Grand Ave? I do not know of many small business retailers willing to make that kind of monetary investment in their property.

I encourage you to approve of their request. I am hoping the City of St Paul will encourage small business growth. Most importantly encourage and foster a strong community and neighborhood. Rafic and Summer have my full support and utmost respect for their continued presence in this neighborhood that my family calls home.

Sincerely,

Joanna Kirilin Mueller and Paul Mueller
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