



West 7th / Fort Road Federation
395 Superior Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102
651.298.5599
www.FortRoadFederation.org

July 28, 2025

Zoning Committee
Saint Paul Planning Commission
25 West Fourth Street, Suite 1400
Saint Paul, MN 55102
ZoningCases@ci.stpaul.mn.us

**Subject: Letter Regarding Master Plan Amendment & Variance Request - 1455
Victoria Way
FILE # 25-054-206
Hearing Date: July 31, 2025**

Dear Members of the Zoning Committee,

On behalf of the West 7th/Fort Road Federation, I write to express our opposition to the proposed major modification of the Victoria Park Master Plan. This request comes alongside nine variance requests to allow Nova Classical Academy to construct a two-story storm shelter building at 1455 Victoria Way. While we do not oppose the construction of a storm shelter in principle, this proposal would come at the direct expense of the long-standing goals and intent of the adopted Master Plan. Approving this change would further weaken the plan's commitment to a mixed use urban village.

This parcel is currently designated for Mixed Residential Use in the adopted Master Plan. That designation, and future land use determination, was central to the long-term vision for Victoria Park: a "pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented community that provides a range of housing choices and prices," intended to "reweave" the urban fabric of a formerly industrial site. The proposed institutional development is not aligned with that intent and represents another significant and irreversible departure from the community's vision.

It is important to understand that the Master Plan has already undergone multiple revisions that significantly compromised the public goals for the site. Notably, the

The Fort Road Federation coordinates participation in advocacy and planning and builds community connections for the residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations of the West 7th neighborhood so that it is a place where people want to live, work, and play.

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planned commercial and mixed-use components never materialized or were given time to take root. As a result, what was envisioned as a vibrant, multi-use community shifted toward nearly exclusively residential development. These development patterns encourage communities that can feel disconnected or isolated from the broader neighborhood, since they offer no amenities for non-residents of those spaces. The lack of commercial spaces in these residential developments also leads to a level of car-dependency for residents that contrasts with the vision of an urban village. Over time that vision continued to erode. The original plan called for 850 housing units, but after legal battles, economic recession, and changing priorities, only 423 units have been built. In 2009, 36 acres of land initially intended for housing became permanently dedicated parkland after a court settlement. In 2011, further amendments reduced the housing target to 500 units.

In 2016, Nova purchased the final parcel slated for townhomes and mansion-style housing (“buildings that will resemble large single-family structures, but will include 5-8 units per building”). Since that time, the parcel has remained undeveloped, effectively removing it from the city’s housing pipeline at a time when housing needs are urgent. Other than this parcel, there is no more land slated and available for housing development at Victoria Park. To now permit further institutional development on this last potential housing parcel would solidify the loss of community-centered land use and permanently eliminate any chance of fulfilling the housing goals of the plan.

Nova engaged with the Federation at our Transportation and Land Use Committee meeting on June 4, 2025 and received positive feedback regarding the project. It is important to note that they stated the project did not require any variances and that they were not seeking a letter of support, but were simply sharing information with the community. While the opportunity for community input was appreciated, this framing significantly limited the nature of feedback and scrutiny. Had the proposal been presented as what it now is — a Master Plan amendment and nine variance requests — our evaluation would have been far more thorough, and community members would have responded with greater engagement and concern.

Given the long history of compromises to the Master Plan and the ongoing erosion of the public vision for Victoria Park, this proposal represents yet another step away from a livable, equitable, and balanced neighborhood. We believe this site remains essential for the fulfillment of the plan’s original goals, and institutional expansion is incompatible with that intent.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Zoning Committee to recommend denial of the requested Master Plan amendment and therefore the variance requests. Saint Paul deserves development that aligns with adopted plans, reflects community input, and upholds the public interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at 651-298-5599 or julia@fortroadfederation.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia McColley', with a stylized, cursive script.

Julia McColley
Executive Director

CC: Councilmember Rebecca Noecker
Stefan Hankerson, City Planner