

Anton Jerve, Planner
Samantha Henningson, Ward 4 Councilperson
City of St. Paul
Sunday, April 8, 2018

Re: 842 Raymond Development Conditional Height Zoning
2330 Long Avenue Rezoning Application

Dear Mr. Jerve and Ms. Henningson -

Overall, we support denser new development in our neighborhood, and Jamie Stolpestad's proposed projects at 842 Raymond and next door at 2330 Long Ave will be vital additions if well-conceived.

That said, we have serious concerns about the building heights being proposed for those projects, and want to push for more reasonable limits within the current zoning envelope.

Background

In 2001, we were part of the team that purchased 856 Raymond on the edge of a mostly residential area and the commercial nexus of University and Raymond, and converted it from a little-used warehouse. We saved the building and divided it into seven owner-occupied commercial condominiums which have allowed us to build a sustainable presence and bring creative voices and vitality to the neighborhood. In the time since, our businesses have employed about 75 people.

More than 10 years ago, I was one of the founding members of the Creative Enterprise Zone, which has helped encourage many smart, creative developments to come to the neighborhood as a result of the Green Line improvements and improving economy.

In 2010, we rezoned 856 Raymond with our neighbor at 842 from nonconforming residential to T2. *We specifically sought T2 because it most closely matched the scale that we and the city felt was appropriate for our neighborhood.*

It is cliché that developers claiming financial obstacles are always wanting to push the zoning limits of their projects, and often do so at the expense of the surrounding urban fabric. And while it is true that good design can overcome such obstacles, it also is true that you cannot legislate good design. But, we can use zoning guidelines meant to stabilize our community without overturning them hastily.

842 Raymond

We are very supportive that Mr. Stolpestad is saving the carpenter's union structure and proposing a program that will be a great addition to the CEZ.

The zoning on the 842 is T2, with limits of 35', or 45' with a conditional use permit. The plans that we've seen top out with a stepped wall at roughly 50' high from where it abuts our shared property line to the east when you add in the extra 4' grade drop from where the zero datum is given. The current design does step back to conform with guidelines allowing extra height, but *if one of the purposes of "conditional use" is to verify that the design doesn't negatively impact light and air issues on surrounding properties, what we've seen does not meet that requirement.*

In the attached shadow study, you can see that a 4-story addition shadows our own studio *completely from November 1 to March 1*. 3 of our studios have their only glass facing the courtyard, and we rely on passive solar heating to temper our studio during the coldest weather of the year. 4 stories worth of shadow would greatly reduce the impact of what is one of the nicer spaces in our entire neighborhood - one that has often been visited on tours, and hosted innumerable neighborhood meetings.

We have been talking with Mr. Stolpestad to reduce the height of the north wall to a more appropriate (but still plenty tall!) 3 stories. We would strongly advocate for a hard line limit on building height, which might affect not only the area to the east which is most of concern to us, but the rest of the project as well. If he is able to reconfigure the project resulting in a lower height to the east only, we could embrace that as well.

2330 Long Ave

The request to increase the zoning on that lot to T3 opens up the potential of the project to top out even higher than at 842. The surrounding residential dwellings are either two or three stories, and even the newer condominiums are below 35'. There may be taller design solutions that can be successful on that lot, but we strongly feel that they be required to demonstrate that rather than be given carte blanche with the less restrictive zoning.

Although more density is part of the long range plan along Raymond, it will necessarily contain many houses, and is a different character than that along University. For context, the largest building along Raymond that is not a skyscraper is the 100 year old Baker Court, with an eave line of about 30'. If it can be successful, then a 35' limit for buildings along Raymond should be too. Bringing in T3 zoning into that context sets a potentially damaging precedent.

Parking

Our Condominium Association currently rents parking for the retail businesses on the 2330 site. Those retail businesses are extremely concerned about the viability of their businesses with the reduction in parking that these two new developments bring. Building higher will not come with more parking, only more people, which makes another argument about overbuilding.

These are promising projects and we ask you to please work with us to ensure that they stay within the lower limits of the current zoning envelope and fit more appropriately with the rest of the neighborhood.

Respectfully,



Geoffrey Warner, Alchemy Architects