

FILE NUMBER 21-289-699, 695 Grand ("Dixies") CUP and Variances Appeal. Support the appeal and deny the CUP and variances.

Sonja Mason <sonjainfo@comcast.net>

Tue 9/14/2021 9:42 AM

To: Councilmember Dai Thao <daithao@public.govdelivery.com>

Cc: #Ci-StPaul_Ward1 <Ward1@ci.stpaul.mn.us>

📎 2 attachments (1 MB)

"Not Shorter" A Better Way.pdf;

ACFrOgBS3DABcuxdDMblrNB34Lcf5LdKE3LXdB0dpa43c_kilgEz78mGy5CJnKCUjzlhJwQjTQA0zq_38qgy2620k6hrwgJWBP7pNdgqerZWjZA3vcRxxwjk2QyIWtu7MBg1K1Nr2NdkgZOAfmX.pdf;

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

Councilmember Thao:

At the August hearing on the rezoning for Dixie/695, you said that adjustments to this design could be made at the appeal of the CUP and the variances.

I hope you will be true to your word.

Please do the right thing. Enforce the zoning code. In regard to FILE NUMBER 21-289-699, 695 Grand ("Dixies") CUP and Variances Appeal, **I urge you to support the appeal and deny the CUP and variances.**

There are many law-based and fact-based reasons to oppose these variances, which you hopefully have read in all the letters and voicemails received from renters, homeowners, businesses and employees from all over St Paul. I will outline a few here

- The only stated reason for the CUP and variances are economic — to increase the profits for an Edina-resident owner and a St. Louis Park based developer. To be clear, they can't vote in Saint Paul if they don't live here.
- If you vote in favor of the CUP, for this you are supporting increased profits that will flow out of our community, while harming the quality of life for neighboring residents—renters and homeowners, and voters.
- If you vote to allow the exceptions requested on this project, you will be doing so in support living costs that are more than double the median rent in our district. These rents are likely to cause displacement and lead to the demolition the affordable housing options we have in our district, which tend to cluster close to Grand Avenue.

In addition to these key points, I wanted to bring up an issue that I think has been overlooked, which is how the dismissive and disingenuous the development team has been of the neighborhood context. Specifically, ESG and RW have repeatedly **presented inaccurate information pertaining to the heights and setbacks of surrounding properties**. In every case, buildings were presented as taller or with smaller setbacks than they have in reality. These inaccuracies were pointed out to the them during and after each of the public zoom meetings, but were not corrected. In one telling case, the inaccurate representation of the neighbor has taller than it reality was changed—it was *increased*. (See attachments)

Similarly, in the face of the overwhelming feedback from neighbors that the building was too tall and too massive, the development team chose to increase the building height. At the 6/8/21 community meeting, held via Zoom and hosted by Summit Hill Association, ESG architect Bob Loken said, "The building didn't get shorter," to describe that, in fact, the developer made the building 3.5 feet taller from their community outreach meetings and the final, presented design. Note that the increase in height was driven by even taller ceiling heights for the main floor and the penthouse, as well as an insensitive response to the gradual slope of the site. The project has 9+ foot ceilings on all levels and 14 to 16 heights on the main floor. Do high ceiling heights "needed" to charge luxury-priced rents justify a [variance](#)? Are 8-0 ceilings a hardship?

Sincerely,
Sonja Mason
21 St Albans St S

[ATTACHMENTS](#)

This building at 707 Grand is located directly west of 695 Grand (you can see the teal-colored wall of Emmett's on the right of the photos) is a 2-story 25 foot tall building. It was represented in the submission to the city as 37 feet tall and then amended to be 38 feet tall.

Attached is a PDF detailing just a few of these misrepresentations, from the ABetterWay-StP.com website. A Better Way is the neighborhood group that has brought forth the appeal.

Just one example: a letter submitted as public comment from a community member detailing errors in ESG/RW presentation

A BETTER WAY ([HTTPS://ABETTERWAY-STP.COM/](https://abetterway-stp.com/))

“Not Shorter”

(<https://abetterway-stp.com/not-shorter/>)

“The building did not get shorter”

“This looks pretty much the same, only subtle articulations”

-Bob Loken, ESG Architects, at 6/8/21 SHA meeting describing changes to the design in response to neighborhood feedback



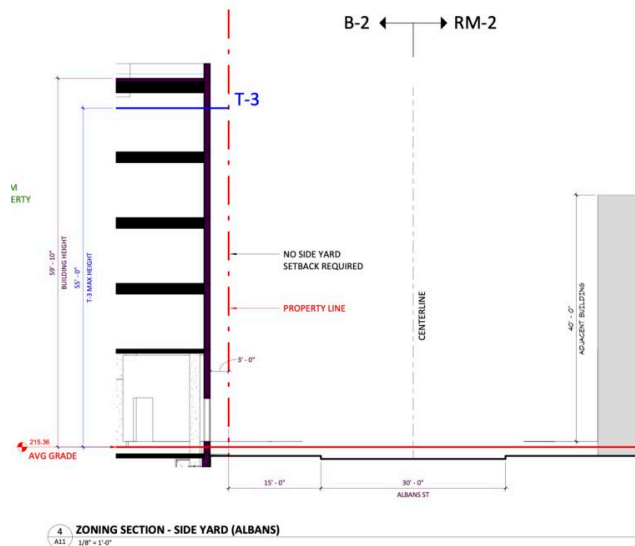
disingenuous response to neighborhood feedback

At the 6/8/21 community meeting, held via Zoom and hosted by Summit Hill Association, ESG architect Bob Loken said “ The building didn’t get shorter“ to describe that, in fact, the developer made the building 3-1/2 feet taller since the last iteration. They chose to increase the building height in the face of the overwhelming feedback from neighbors that the building is too tall and too massive. Note that the increase in height is driven by even taller ceiling heights on main floor and penthouse, as well as an insensitive response to the gradual slope of the site. The project has 9+ foot ceilings on all levels and 14 to 16 heights on the main floor. Do high ceiling heights “needed” to charge luxury rents justify a variance (<https://abetterway-stp.com/zoning/>)? Are 8-0 ceilings a hardship? This height increase is measured at the average grade for the site. Along St Albans, a residential side street with only 3 foot setback proposed, the building climbs to over 64 feet in height. Heights are measured to the roof surface, and do not include the parapet. **After months of public feedback saying the building was too massive and too tall, the developer came back with a taller building and called it “not shorter.”**



([https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-](https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf)

[content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf](https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf))



([https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-](https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf)

[content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf](https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf))

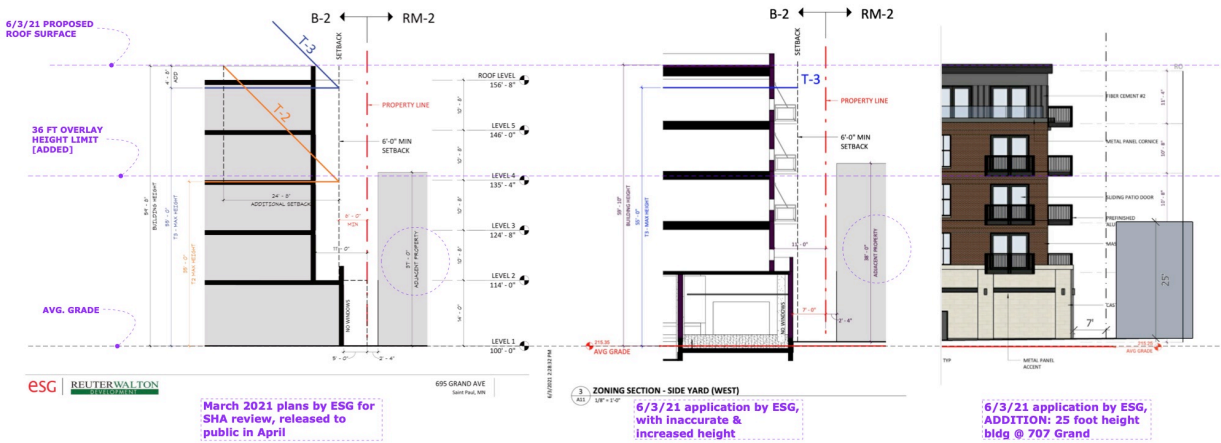
Images: (1) 6/3/21 Heights at corner of St Albans & Grand, showing 60 foot "zoning height" (measured at average grade of lot) and 64 foot effective height. Image by ESG. (2) March 2021 Height diagram at St Albans, showing shorter, originally proposed 56 foot height. Note that the incre

The simple phrase of “not shorter” shows the level of disregard that has been shown for the concerns of the neighbors. The repeated misrepresentation of the building sizes of the neighbors shows a disregard for neighborhood context and accuracy. Added on to this, **the developer largely completed their plans before even getting a**

proper land survey of the site. As Mr. Loken reported on June 8th, the revised design looks “pretty much the same.” The increase in height is caused by **not** planning the building to the site, instead, they dropped a formulaic plan that has been used over and over in other locations onto a sloped site. When they discovered there was a slope, they simply jacked up the building.

misrepresentations

In a height study from March the developers showed a neighboring building that is two stories as being 37 feet high. Neighboring buildings that are 2 1/2 stories are labeled as 3 1/2 stories. This could be an error, right? Except these inaccuracies were pointed out by several neighbors, in correspondence and at the public meeting on April 22. In the revised height study submitted to the city June 3, none of these were corrected. In fact the 25 foot tall building that had been labeled as 37 feet got taller (“not shorter”) by a foot and it’s now 38 feet. The image below shows a comparison between the March height diagram (left), the June application diagram (center), and the proposed elevation with the the correctly-sized neighboring building added. The image on the right shows actual 25 foot height of the building at 707 Grand in comparison to the proposal. The height limit of the East Grand Avenue Overlay has also been added, since it was left off every planning diagram produced by the developer.



(<https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf>)

Images: (1) March 2021 Height diagram at west property line (from alley looking south), showing 25 foot tall building as 37 feet (2) 6/3/21 Height diagram at west property line (from alley looking south), showing 25 foot tall building as 37 feet



([https://abetterway-](https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf)

[stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf](https://abetterway-stp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/heights.pdf))

Due to these errors of omission and inaccurate data, volunteer professional labor by neighbors has been undertaken. Neighbors used a surveying tools, a laser measure with height triangulation to capture the heights of neighboring buildings. The building at 707 Grand is 25 feet high. It is a two-story building.



ZLU Committee <zlu@summithillassociation.org>

The four corners of Grand and Saint Albans: Correction to info from 695 Grand Development Team

Kucera Marit Lee <maritleekucera@comcast.net>

Fri, Jun 11, 2021 at 10:21 PM

To: ZLU@summithillassociation.org, info@summithillassociation.org, Simon Taghioff <simon.taghioff@gmail.com>

Cc: sonja.butler@ci.stpaul.mn.us, luis.pereira@ci.stpaul.mn.us, rebecca.noecker@ci.stpaul.mn.us, luiserangelmorales@gmail.com

Dear ZLU and SHA,

This letter is to correct misinformation repeatedly given by Bob Loken of ESG architectural firm for the Kennefick and Reuter Walton project at 695 Grand.

At three of the public Zoom meetings, Mr. Loken stated that one justification for the new 695 to come right up on the property lines on Grand and St. Albans is that the other buildings on the other three corners of the Saint Albans/Grand intersection, all come right up to the sidewalks. Only on the southeast corner, the dry cleaners, is this true.



ABOVE: On the southwest corner, the 3-story apartment building (682 Grand) abuts the sidewalk on the St. Albans side, but the Grand front-of-the-building has 12'8" of grass, scrubs, and trees. Since this used to be a bus stop, there is no boulevard of green grass.



ABOVE: To the west of 682 and directly across the street from the current Dixie's and Emmett's building are 694 and 696 Grand; both have a setback from the sidewalk of approximately 30', with a boulevard of 6'5". The 2-story residential buildings just west of 695 on the north side of Grand, are similar to these shown above, with a wide setback from the sidewalk.



ABOVE: On the northeast corner are two six-unit buildings (30 and 42 South Saint Albans, Fillmore and Walter Homeowner's Association, twelve owner-occupied condos since 1976), with enclosed screen porches that come up to the sidewalk, but there is a 26' wide garden from the south side of #42 South Saint Albans to the Grand sidewalk, running the entire length of the building, approximately 75'. DETAIL BELOW) This garden won an award from GABA in the 1990s as the best garden on Grand. The award came with a black/white photo of the two large stately houses, facing St. Albans, which once occupied what is now Dixie's/695.



BELOW: Plus there is a green garden space with a tree, flowering plants, and hostas, 26' wide x 9', between the two buildings, with parking for condo owners east of the fence.



I respectfully submit these pictures for the record. The contention of the 695/Dixie's development team that the footprint of nearby buildings justifies their to-the-lot-line/sidewalk design is not true; it is false.

Thank you to ZLU and SHA for all the time and efforts all have given to this 695 development project. As a 45+-year resident (both renter and owner), I urge you, please, be sure that all the "facts" given by the 695 Development Team are true, pertinent, valid, and verifiable.

I urge you to support the East Grand Avenue Overlay District guidelines.

Respectfully,
Marit Kucera
30 South Saint Albans