

**Comments received by St Paul City Council Ward 6 regarding the development of 540/542 Portland Ave, 20-January-2021:**

**From:** Jason Patalonis

**Sent:** Wednesday, January 6, 2021 9:29 AM

**Subject:** strong opposition to the development of 540/542 Portland Avenue

Councilwoman Yang,

As a lifelong resident of St. Paul and a 30 year resident and tax payer at 506 Portland, I am writing to you to express my concerns over the entire development and process that we have experienced. From city technological failures to improper notice to outright lies from the architect and no interaction from the developer/owner we have hit obstacle upon obstacle to stop this project. The need for 6 variances proves alone proves that the project as currently designed is inappropriate for the space. While those of us in opposition to this project are not opposed to developing the property, we want it done correctly-meaning it is done so with neighborhood involvement and historical design integrity. The shared driveway owners have never been contacted by the developer, the HPC commissioners who are architects lead the vote to deny approval and one commissioner was so out of touch her synopsis of our opposition was "they are concerned about construction traffic" which has never been a part of the discussion.

In conclusion I think the following statement from former HPC President, noted architect and appeal filer Gar Hargens sums it up.

"The design makes a mockery of the HPC and Zoning Guidelines. (it requires a staggering six Variances!). As pointed out to (and subsequently recognized by) the HPC, the design is out of scale, character (it's not a secondary building), rhythm, and pattern in the Neighborhood. Its "Summit Exposure" is fake on a street that holds a National reputation for historic authenticity and care. The economic and cultural value to the City and the Neighborhood of their Historic Districts has been a long time in the making and should not be carelessly ignored."

I ask that you please deny this project and require the developer and architect, with input from the neighborhood, to start from scratch. This way through collaboration, this can become a standard for development in an historic district, not an insult.

Respectfully,

Jason Patalonis

506 Portland Avenue

**From:** WENDY SURPRISE

**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021 11:25 AM

**Subject:** Re: Position Statement of the Summit Avenue Residential Preservation Association (SARPA) on the appeal of HPC decision regarding 540 Portland Avenue

Good afternoon. My name is Wendy Surprise and I live at 546 Portland Avenue. I am reaching out to you today to express my opposition to the proposed triplex at 540 Portland Avenue.

There are quite a few groups that have weighed in on this and at this point, I admit that I am confused by the process and which group, including local government groups, do what.

What I am perfectly clear about is my dismay that the City is even considering this project. I cannot understand the upside.

This block is very dense in the first place. There are single family and multi family throughout. There is a residential women's home (sober living) across the street from proposed project. The parking is a challenge every day.

I have lived in St. Paul since 1996 and moved to this neighborhood in 2019. I have complained to the City about the existing property several times because it is not well maintained.

I don't believe this process has been transparent. I don't believe the developer cares about preserving the neighborhood. It's all about money.

**From:** Daniel Chouinard

**Sent:** Tuesday, January 26, 2021 10:55 AM

**Subject:** Appeal re. 540 Portland Avenue

Dear Councilmember Yang,

We write to you with the sincere request that you deny the appeal by Sullivan Property Investments of the HPC ruling regarding a proposed second triplex at 540 Portland Avenue.

We have lived on the 500 block of Portland Avenue since 2013 and were drawn here by the prospect of a bicycle-, pedestrian- and transit-friendly routine. We have consciously chosen to live in other densely built neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul prior to this.

Suggestions that Portland Avenue neighbors object to diversity or density or smart development are unfounded. For our part, we have chosen to live here precisely for the mix of all of these, and for how well and how long the neighborhood has integrated these elements with the goal of preserving urban history and heritage.

What's really at issue here is an outsized development proposal and a design process that effectively bypassed the immediate neighborhood.

1. The size and design of the proposed project are fundamentally out of step with neighborhood character and long-range city plans. Does a city committed to reducing auto dependency really need a triplex with three garages and three car lifts? Does a city committed to building more housing that's accessible to persons with low incomes, persons with disabilities, and families with children really need a building with so much garage space and so little living and green space? With a request for six variances, this project is clearly too big for its location.

2. The process of engaging the neighborhood in planning and feedback has been flawed from the start. The developer waited for over a year before offering to meet with neighbors, provide information and hear feedback. Since then, he has misrepresented neighborhood sentiment and has rebuffed invitations from neighborhood groups to discuss the project.

An example: In the days immediately following the September 26 informational meeting with surprised neighbors who had just learned about the project and how it was headed for final HPC and BZA approval, the developer visited the neighborhood and came away with seventeen "letters of support." The misrepresentation here is that these are, in fact, no more than a few hastily scribbled words (most are 12 words or less) on a one-page form bearing an oversimplified and flattering depiction of the proposed building. Only one letter is from a resident of the block in question. Each of these is now counted among the developer's much-vaunted Letters of Support, including the one which reads, in its entirety, "Love the design!" To present these as evidence of substantive neighborhood support is fundamentally misleading.

The Heritage Preservation Commission, at its December 14 meeting, listened to the neighborhood, to urban history experts and to the HPC's three architect members. Commissioners acknowledged the developer's failure to engage the community from the beginning of this project, reversed their initial decision to approve, and recommended that the developer work more closely with neighbors on revisions to the plan.

We now ask you to do the same: acknowledge that there should be direct community input involving surrounding neighbors, and acknowledge that this plan needs further work in order to be designed and sized appropriately for the neighborhood. We ask that you deny the developer's appeal. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with the developer for a design that is more right-sized, meets HPC guidelines, and is a better fit within the long-range plans for the city of St. Paul.

Sincerely and with thanks for your attention,

Dan Chouinard and John Sularz

**From:** Cathy Maes

**Sent:** Tuesday, January 26, 2021 11:51 AM

**Subject:** We would like to work with the developer on 540 Portland

Dear Councilmember Yang,

This letter documents the communication timeline as it pertains to the proposed, denied and now appealed project on 540 Portland Avenue. The HPC directed the developer to engage the community and after days of hearing nothing Tom Darling and I drafted a letter requesting a meeting. We have done our best to follow city rules, processes, guidelines and navigate our way through lack of communication, failed technology all coupled with a denial of community input.

*Wednesday, December 23, 2020 12:09 PM*

*Dear Carlos and Olov,*

*As you are aware from the Historic Preservation Commission hearing our organizations are concerned about your plans for a new triplex at 540 Portland. In all cases we believe it is very important for neighborhood organizations such as ours to have an opportunity to discuss and provide meaningful input into plans that will affect the areas we represent. Consultation is critical. The discussions among the HPC members and actions of the HPC at the recent hearing, including the instruction to revise and resubmit a design, demonstrate that the HPC shares this belief.*

*Accordingly, we invite you to a ZOOM meeting to begin a consultation process leading to a revised design. In the initial meeting we can discuss the project assumptions and other basic items so that we can then usefully discuss various design options. As noted, both of our organizations are concerned about the plans for your project and we feel that we can serve a useful function in successfully completing the task the HPC and City Council have set before all of us. We can call upon concerned neighbors who have expertise and who stand to be very directly affected by this project to work with us and with you.*

*It likely will be difficult to bridge the gap between those who oppose this project and you. However, it certainly will be impossible if we do not meet and work hard at resolution. The HPC minutes read "Intent of denial is not to deny the project, but to get the developer and the neighborhood together and hopefully find a mutually acceptable project." The City Council concurred. We would like to help our organizations and those who oppose the project as currently designed and you to achieve that mutually acceptable project.*

*Please respond to this email (to both Cathy and Tom) with some dates and times that would be convenient for you for the ZOOM meeting we propose. We believe we must do this very soon so we can all move forward.*

*Thank you,*

*Cathy Maes Ramsey Hill Association  
and*

*Tom Darling Summit Avenue Residential Preservation Association*

RESPONSE:

*Wednesday, Dec 30, 2020 at 10:24 PM*

*Hi Cathy – Thank you for reaching out;*

*Excuse me for the slow response. As the HPC timeline for reaching a decision precluded the commissioners from postponing the vote, as it was suggested during the HPC hearing, the entire process would need to start all over again. In any case, I think it would be in the best interest of the neighbors and the owner to have the HPC staff sponsoring any future meetings, to make sure meeting minutes are recorded properly and they can be used for the commissioners review. We'll notify you of any future meetings and also the neighbors that submitted letters of opposition, so everybody that wants to express their opinion can be heard.*

*I am including George Gause and Allisson Eggers on this email to maintained them informed. Please do not hesitate to let you know if you have any comments.*

*I hope you a wonderful Holidays and Happy New Year.*

Sketches LLC

*Carlos R. Pérez | Architect | NCARB*

*Sincerely,  
Cathy Maes*