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Date: 4/6/2011 9:20 AM
Subject: 4/6/2011 Public Hearing - Ord 11-27

Please enter this e-mail message into the official record of the 4/6/2011 public hearing for Ord 11-27, which deals with changes to the Zoning Code in the area of the Central Corridor LRT Project.

I neither support or oppose the ordinance as a whole, but there are specific aspects of this ordinance that I support, and some that I oppose.

I support the change to T3 zoning along the south side of University Avenue between Prior and Fairview. This zoning level is more appropriate to the surrounding residential uses. It allows higher densities but not at a level to overcrowd the residential area located immediately adjacent to the current business zone along University Avenue.

I oppose the provision to allow developers to apply for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to build structures taller than the recommended zoning limits for any of the new T zones. I believe that maximum building heights should be established for each T category and then rigidly enforced. Including language that allows a CUP to be considered for a property conveys the message that the taller building height is the true maximum limit, rendering the lower height that supposedly is the maximum to be meaningless. The Zoning Code should clearly state the maximum building height allowed in a district, period. I own a business located in a building in what will become a T3 zone, adjacent to a property on University Avenue that will also be zoned T3. The maximum building height for T3 is 55 feet for a mixed-use building, but a CUP could be granted for a 90-foot tall building. Even if the building is "stepped back" from the street, that wouldn't be the case along the back side of the building and it would create a monolithic wall that would tower over the small parking lot behind our 2-story mixed-use building. That parking lot also functions as a back yard for the residents of the 22 non-subsidized affordable housing units in the building. Imagine having a 90-foot building looming over your back yard. Imagine the view into all the back yards and windows from the upper floors of a 90-foot tall building. No privacy fence would prevent this intrusion. I believe that the 55-foot limit should be strictly enforced for T3 zoning areas, most of which are within a block or two of single-family/duplex residential areas.

I oppose any provision that would change the status of auto-oriented businesses to non-conforming. This would prevent them from expanding should business conditions permit, and make obtaining financing for building upgrades virtually impossible. Cars will be with us for the foreseeable future, and we don't want to have to leave our neighborhood to obtain parts and service for our cars. We need a full range of businesses located right in our neighborhoods to serve our needs so when we do drive, we won't have to travel far.

I also oppose any rules that allow developers to build buildings without any parking requirements, especially in T3 zones. Because most T3 zones are within a block or two of single-family residential areas, the lack of parking at new buildings would choke nearby streets with parked cars and make it impossible for many existing businesses to remain because their customers would no longer be able to park. Customers coming to my bicycle shop often are bringing broken bicycles, which are bulky and difficult to transport, and will need to park close to our store in order to unload them. Likewise, customers purchasing "fixer-upper" bicycles, which are a large percentage of our sales, will need to load them into their cars to take them home. When considering the parking needs of local businesses, there must be provision to ensure customers that they will be able to park convenient to the business or many customers will go elsewhere and that business will be lost.

Finally, I wish to point out that St. Paul's population declined during this last decade. There are already a lot of vacant housing units. While we will need more small housing units for child-free households, that will only be true for the next 20 to 30 years. Besides, most seniors prefer to remain in the homes that they worked a lifetime to pay for, for as long as they are able. Meanwhile, we need to find ways to attract more middle-income families with children to St. Paul in order to ensure the future of our city. High-rise "people warehouses" are not the answer. We don't want to live like people in Manhattan, in overcrowded high-rise Hell. This is St. Paul. Please, dial-down this "density madness" and instead look at how we can improve vitality for locally-owned businesses and attract middle-income families with children to St. Paul.

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