

April 17, 2017

VIA EMAIL

St. Paul City Council
Attn: Katie Burger
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102

RE: Case ABZA 17-5, 1023 Osceola Avenue, Lynn & Val DiEuliis (Appeal to City Council of BZA Grant of Zoning Variances for Linwood School)

Dear Members of the St. Paul City Council:

I urge you to grant the Appeal to reverse the BZA's decision regarding the two variances requested by the SPPS for the expansion of the Linwood School.

I have lived at 1033 Fairmount Avenue, directly across from the open area on the north-side of the school, since 1979, almost 38 years. I have seen many changes in student demographics—from K-12 to K-3—over that time, and I have seen several additions and remodeling projects. I have always enjoyed living across the street from Linwood School, and have felt a need to keep an eye out for the place because I see the school facilities, the staff, and the students as my neighbors, and a part of the neighborhood.

I and my neighbors strongly support the improvements to the Linwood School to upgrade to ADA standards, add a new cafeteria, a new mechanical system, and increase the size of class rooms. We, including at least two architect neighbors, believe these upgrades can be achieved without a variance. On the other hand, we would support a modest variance to accomplish the improvements, and we would welcome an opportunity to work with the SPPS to do just this. The City Council can facilitate that process by granting the Appeal to reverse the BZA's decision so that the neighborhood could be included in a newer, better plan that will accommodate SPPS's and the neighborhood's desires. But we are opposed to these specific variances because the resulting building will be too big, too tall, and too much for the small Linwood lot and the neighborhood.

On Saturday, April 15th, 35-40 neighbors showed up at the Linwood School to stand in a line with yellow tape to show where the boundaries of the proposed building would be. I have included a series of photos below from this demonstration. I have also attached larger copies of these photos in an attachment to this letter.

The first two photos below show an overview of the boundaries of the proposed building on the north-side of the school. It is clear from the photos that a significant portion of the existing play space will be eliminated by the new building.



View of the North-side of Linwood School from across the street on Fairmount Avenue



View from the East from a neighbor's second floor window

The next picture below shows the location of the corner of the proposed building, marked by the neighbor in the blue shirt, and the setback from the property line (approximately the fence) on Oxford Street.



View from NW corner; demonstrates the corner of the proposed building (blue shirt) and the setback on the Oxford Street side (at right).

Finally, the picture below shows the view from a home on Oxford Street. It is clear from the picture that the proposed building, which will be close to 60 feet tall in this view, will totally block this neighbor's view and present a monolith of brick and windows instead of open area and sky that is the present view. Perhaps such a large building so close to the street is acceptable in a commercial setting, but it is out of character for the Linwood neighborhood. The BZA erred in not recognizing this problem.



View from a neighbor's porch on Oxford Street

SPPS argues that it needs to move the 4th grade from the Monroe school, a much larger school campus of two full city blocks, to the proposed expanded Linwood School. This leads them to argue that the variances are required to allow for space and facilities for the newly expanded school population. (Currently, Linwood School handles K-3; the proposed population will be Pre-K through 4, an addition of approximately 150 students.)

The reasons for the variances proffered by SPPS are based on their own educational policy decision to move Pre-K and 4th grade to Linwood School. Several architects in the Linwood neighborhood have offered alternatives that would accommodate a new cafeteria, ADA upgrades, and so forth without the need for these extreme height and footprint variances. SPPS refused to work with us, and refused to consider keeping the 4th grade at Monroe. If City Council finds for the Appellants and reverses the BZA's decision, the neighborhood would be open and happy to work with SPPS to determine a design that would satisfy both parties.

SPPS has created its own problem with the Linwood site and seeks to remedy its problem by arguing that it needs these variances to implement its decision on educational policy. This is an irrelevant argument: educational policy is not at issue, and the BZA erred by not recognizing this.

The neighbors of Linwood object to this oversized expansion of the Linwood school, which, at 60 feet in height with reduced setback on the Oxford Street side, will dwarf all surrounding buildings in the neighborhood (including apartment buildings). In addition, the expanded footprint, which leads to the reduced setback variances, will destroy approximately 40% of the contiguous outdoor play space on the north side of the school.

From my vantage point across the street, I see all of the children out using all the open area on the north side of the school during recess. They fill the place up with their running, playing ball, and, in the winter, rolling giant snowballs. After this expansion, not only will these children be deprived of much of their needed play space, but there will be almost 150 more children vying for half the current space.

The elimination of the open area on the north side of the school will also impact the neighborhood community, which uses the space for recreation all year. For example, the other day on Easter Sunday, I took a picture, reproduced below, of a family enjoying a

baseball game in the open area of Linwood School. I have seen countless games like this—baseball, football, soccer, and others—at Linwood over the past 38 years. If the variances are granted, this resource will be gone forever.



Family Baseball Game at Linwood on Easter Sunday 2017

I request that you reverse the BZA's decision that granted the variances and direct SPSS to work with the neighborhood to create a design that meets the needs of current and future students and educators at Linwood School as well as the Saint Paul community that surrounds it.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

Val DiEuliis (Appellant)
1033 Fairmount Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55015

Attachment

cc: Councilmembers Dai Thao (Ward 1), Rebecca Noecker (Ward 2), Chris Tolbert (Ward 3), Council President Russ Stark (Ward 4), Amy Brendmoen (Ward 5), Dan Bostrom (Ward 6), Jane Prince (Ward 7)



View from the North of Linwood School and a representation of the size of the expansion



View from East from a second story window



View NW corner of the lot; Man in Blue Shirt indicates the corner of the proposed building



View from West on Oxford Street; Indicates the very small setback



View from West on Neighbor's Porch; View will be totally blocked by the proposed building



Family Baseball at Linwood School on Easter Sunday, 2017