

Please reconsider this permit-I live, work and own a business in the area and we do not think a building of this height is appropriate. Also, and more important, the lack of off street parking is a huge issue and will only get worse with this proposed project. I hesitate to send this as I don't feel that our city council listens to the neighbors.

Regards,

jeffrey austin

The Council has received around 70 copies of the email below:

May 26, 2020

Dear Saint Paul City Council Members,

I am writing you regarding our neighborhood's appeal of the May 1, 2020 decision of the Planning Commission granting an amended Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to Northland Real Estate Group and the Ackerberg Group (Northland) for a proposed mixed use building to be located on the current site of Bonfe Mechanical at 337 W 7th/366-372 Smith Avenue.

I am a concerned Saint Paul resident **OR** a concerned Saint Paul resident that lives near the proposed building project in the neighborhoods of Leech Street, Wilkin Street, Douglas Street, Smith Avenue, Goodrich Avenue, Sturgis Street, McBoal Street, Exchange Street, Ryan Avenue, Little Bohemia and Irvine Park that would be directly affected by the amended CUP terms.

We oppose the Commission's 5/1/20 decision for two reasons.

First, the approval to reduce the parking requirement from 136 spaces to 111 will increase traffic congestion and undue demand in our neighborhoods for on-street parking.

Second, the increase in the building's allowable height from 75 feet to 85 feet will be out of scale to other buildings in the area. Buildings that high belong in the downtown area, not in a mixed-use transition area like our neighborhood.

Therefore, we urge the Council to overturn the Commission's 5/1/20 decision and require the project to be built within the CUP changes approved by the Commission on December 20, 2019. Those changes increased the allowed height from 55 feet to 75 feet and allowed a reduction in required parking from 192 spaces to 136.

Our neighborhood's appeal is detailed in our 5/10/20 letter **HERE**,

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DBrDFmqDgfl9ORWbHzadm5hKTSbprtdu/view?usp=sharing>

The Commission's 5/1/20 decision is contrary to city policy as stated in **District 9 Neighborhood Plan**,

<https://www.stpaul.gov/DocumentCenter/View4/66861.pdf>

approved in 2013 and the 2040 Plan, approved by the Council in 2019 (Met Council approval pending) and is contrary to the findings of the **Area Parking Study** completed in 2019.

<https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/city-council/ward-2-councilmember-noecker/west-7th-parking-study>

Our appeal should not be seen as opposition to development in general or specifically to increased housing density or to more affordable housing. We only oppose the Northland project's added height and lack of off-street parking spaces allowed by the Planning Commission on 5/1/20.

Northland's proposal with the latest CUP application is contrary to *at least* 4 provisions of the land use section of the **City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan**:

<https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-economic-development/planning/2040-comprehensive-plan>

LU-9: States the city will promote high quality urban design that enhances the public realm. A building, such as Northland proposes, that is disproportionately high compared to its neighbors does not go hand-in-hand with high quality urban design.

LU-11: States that publicly accessible views should be preserved. By its height and trapezoid shape Northland's proposal will eliminate views from a number of public vantage points in the neighborhood.

LU-30: 2. Requires that building near neighborhood nodes, such as Northland's proximity to Grand and Smith traffic nodes, should provide pedestrian friendly walking spaces. In its CUP, Northland has requested a set-back less than commensurate to the building's proposed height - thereby depriving pedestrians of walking spaces.

LU-34: Provides that neighborhoods for medium density housing such as townhouses, courtyard apartments and smaller multi-family developments compatible with the general scale of Urban Neighborhoods. With 191 units, Northland's proposed structure will - by far - be the most dense building in the area.

By comparison, the 16 story Irvine Park Tower Apartments has only 116 units. The Northland building is simply too large for the space it will be built on.

In conclusion, we urge the City Council to reject the Planning Commission's 5/1/20 decision approving Northland's changes and declare **the conditions approved on 12/20/19** be imposed on the developer. As now proposed, it is the wrong project for this site.

Thank you so much for your valuable time and consideration.

Hello Council Member Noecker,

Is the proposed building at 337 West 7th vying to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize for its design... probably not. However, would a potential development improve on the current environment of a parking lot and one story auto building, probably yes. I want to note, that if this same development were to result in the demolition of existing maintained neighborhood dwellings of the West 7th Neighborhood, I would likely have passionate feelings to oppose a large scale development of this kind.

The entire block that encompasses 337 West 7th Street, at one point could have become a monolithic generic development. At a high-level, I appreciate how this block has developed, re-using a fire station structure, adding at hotel business, and creating office space for our labor partners. I believe that the neighborhood blocks along west 7th should support a diversity of uses and a variety of building scales. That is what makes our neighborhood unique, desirable, and welcoming to residents and independent businesses.

Could the the current design for 337 have more underground parking, yes. Could the design be more unique, sure. Is the current design before us unbuildable, no. I hope that more neighbors have less cars and are able to live in Saint Paul without the need to burn fossil fuels. For me, I lived without a vehicle on Selby Avenue and West 7th Streets for many years, and was able to commute to work via bus and bike. I want to afford the future tenants at 337 the same opportunity.

One issue that is not unique to this building, but that I want to raise is the use of variances in the city of Saint Paul. Many neighbors have put countless hours and energy into well thought out plans and zoning regulations. It bothers me that developers consistently propose plans seeking and expecting height variances. Height variances have become a normalcy in the City of Saint Paul in which such action should be a rarity. Make rules clear and approachable for developers while respecting the efforts of community partners to shape the future of neighborhoods and together the holistic vision of the City of Saint Paul. While I look forward to more neighbors nearby, the granting of a variance should be used with great restraint.

I am not wowed by the proposal at 337 West 7th Street, I do not feel sincerity to oppose its development.

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Cheers,
Adam Yust

Dear Rebecca

Please think carefully and support my neighborhood's variance for the apartment building at 337 West 7th Street.

If built, this monstrosity will tower over a neighborhood which has gone from vacant properties and disinvestment, to a thriving urban neighborhood. Already faced with parking issues due to its proximity to Xcel Energy Center and United Hospital, the

addition of this social experiment will overwhelm the homes, apartments, and small businesses which have sprung up and thrived!

The community supported increased density for this when the developer proposed a more dense zoning change. **Sadly, the Planning Commission has erroneously approved yet another variance which the developer claims is needed to add rentable units due to more rock than expected.** This is hogwash! It is common knowledge that this end of West 7th is built on rock. Recent developments like The Residence Inn hotel and Cossettas have dealt with the inability to dig a deep basement to park cars. Any competent planner, architect, or engineer would take this into account before coming this far in the development process. **The additional floors proposed are necessary only for the need to finance more units into this footprint.**

The Planning Commission also erred **in ignoring the District Plan itself** which specifically calls for a medium density and heights as the neighborhood steps down from the heights of downtown structures. **It actually conflicts with the District plan** approved by neighborhood and City Council, which points specifically to Irvine Park Towers just a block away as what NOT to allow into the urban landscape. Directly across the street, modest small houses and apartment buildings no more than 3 stories will contend with views not only on the street front, but an entire side elevation stretching from West 7th to Smith Avenue where it would empty onto a constricted street fed by Downtown, The High Bridge and Ramsey Hill. Even today, rush hour is bumper to bumper cars from the high bridge to United and Childrens Hospitals and the off ramp of northbound 35E.

There is no traffic study to justify this!

West 7th along its entire length has grown and thrived over the last 30 years. Once emptied by urban flight and the carved out stretch of 35E, each year has seen investment in individual homes, small businesses and appropriately sited affordable and market rate multifamily housing in the Panama Flats, Upper Landing, Schmidt Artists Lofts as well as hundreds of affordable rehabs developed by the Fort Road Federation.

This community has openly welcomed and yes, initiated the development of affordable multi-family rentals which fit seamlessly into the fabric of the oldest neighborhood in the City of St. Paul! This carefully planned and community supported development has turned West 7th into a model of how to rebuild a city by mixing rental, ownership and small business into the fabric, resulting in a successful neighborhood often pointed to thriving and advancing into the next decades.

This development will turn years of carefully led progress onto its side and discourage the reinvestment that has occurred to date!

Please support the continued revitalization of West 7th by supporting the neighborhood's appeal of the Planning Commission decision!

Dave and Sue Thune
26 Irvine Park

