

Paulette Myers-Rich
436 Smith Avenue N.
St. Paul, MN 55102

RE: District 9 Commercial Zoning Changes

Dear City Council Members.

I am writing in support of the Planning Commission's resolution to change the zoning in the District 9 Commercial Zoning Study Areas to T-2. These sites are in the middle of the oldest residential and commercial area of St. Paul; a historic neighborhood that's continually improving both residentially and commercially. It's a strong, cohesive and involved neighborhood with residents who have worked diligently to reclaim vacant houses and improve the ones they own, as well as volunteering to improve parks and streets for the benefit of our neighbors and businesses.

But there are a few areas of blight in our midst where we've not seen improvement and in fact, have been concerned about the property owner's goals for the development of the sites they own. They have not exercised good faith with our community nor have they worked with the Federation to seek out appropriate developers or buyers for their properties, nor are they putting them to the highest and best use. You can see from the photos in the PED Package that these lots are an eyesore in the neighborhood and give the impression that this is a bad, run down part of town that one should pass through as quickly as possible.

However, it is clear from the PED Study that these sites are in sensitive areas in close proximity to historic housing and commercial buildings and are in fact gateways to Ramsey and Grand Avenues, Downtown, the United Hospital campus, to the hospitality industry along W. 7th and the historic Uppertown and Irvine Park neighborhoods. It is also the gateway to the Great River Passage from Ramsey Hill down Smith Avenue to the river bluffs parks and pathways.

Yet, to see these properties, you would think you were in a remote part of the Bronx or some troubled city where the property owners have contempt for the area and its residents. For several years we've had to look chain link fences topped with barbed wire, acres of asphalt, a huge weedy dirt pile where a house was razed and filthy sidewalks full of broken glass and garbage in the summer and ice in the winter. When people come into our part of town, they are intimidated by what they see and are nervous about the neighborhood. They don't like coming here. Yet we in the neighborhood walk down these streets, wait for buses and live adjacent to this blight everyday. It has been exceptionally frustrating and sad to see our neighborhood treated this way. The moratorium happened because we came together as a community to demand that this area be studied to determine the best use and fit for the context and surrounding assets in this community.

This once residential area has been made into a dead zone by speculative real estate deals that have left it bereft of any assets to the surrounding neighborhoods. In this tough economic time, property owners are now under economic pressure to sell to the first developer to come along. However, the community in District 9 is dedicated to seeing the appropriate reuse of these sites. We have a vision for the West End and will work positively with the kind of developers who will share that vision. We want to be proactive, and not be put in the position of constantly fighting development which conflicts with the neighborhood's goals. We are convinced after years of waiting for something fitting to be proposed for these sites, that the only way it can happen is to change the current zoning to T-2 and to update the Fort Road Design guidelines in order to encourage and guide the kind of development that would enhance this important gateway neighborhood and draw people in to enjoy all it has to offer.

Sincerely, Paulette Myers-Rich