

**Anne White
1731 Portland Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55104**

October 11, 2011

Council Members:

I am writing in support of the Union Park District Council appeal of the 650 Pelham Boulevard site plan approval for a one-story, suburban-style office-warehouse building.

This property is in a critical position to set the tone for future development in this area, located as it is between the residential neighborhood of Desnoyer Park and the Creative Zone around the Raymond Avenue LRT Station. The originally proposed T-4 zoning designation was intended to provide a transition to the higher densities envisioned for the area along Pelham north of I-94. But it was changed back to I-1 in response to a request from the Port Authority, slipping through the cracks in the midst of a corridorwide rezoning.

Unfortunately, Desnoyer Park had no knowledge of the change, and so there was no pushback from those who were most directly affected by the zoning change. In fact, because the property is just outside the borders of the Union Park District Council, there was no requirement to notify the council, so Desnoyer Park residents were not aware of the proposed zoning change to I-1 until it was too late. (The issue of notification across district council borders should probably be addressed by the Planning department, since substantial development is likely to occur along the Central Corridor in the future, and district councils on both sides of University Avenue will be affected.)

Now we're faced with a site plan that is completely unsuitable for this key site that serves as Desnoyer Park's gateway to what we hope will become a thriving TOD district around the Raymond LRT station. Those who spoke in favor of the project at last week's public hearing acknowledged that this is a very desirable location for enterprises such as biotech that would like to be near light rail with easy access to the University of Minnesota. We agree that this is an ideal location for such businesses, but it would be even more attractive – and job producing -- if it was developed as a new TOD site, with a more urban 2-story building built up to the sidewalk, architecturally distinctive windows and doors facing the street, and parking out of sight behind the building. Bringing the building up to the sidewalk is also important to provide eyes-on-the-street to ensure safety for pedestrians and bicyclists on Pelham, which is the only direct route from Desnoyer Park to the Raymond Avenue Station.

The Union Park appeal cites the primary concerns of the Desnoyer Park neighborhood:

- The building is set back from Pelham, with surface parking lots on all sides;
- Only 68 jobs are guaranteed on a prime site that should provide many more;
- 196 parking spaces are planned for a one-story office-warehouse building less than ¼ mile from a light rail station – does this smell like a future park-and-ride?

- There are no confirmed tenants for the building, so it might well sit empty for some time after construction.

To make matters worse, the developer is apparently receiving what is effectively a subsidy. According to a recent article in the Daily Planet, “The St. Paul Port Authority... bought the property for \$2.6 million in 2009 and then poured in another million dollars in clean-up costs.” Now Kelly Jameson of the Port Authority says he can’t confirm a purchase price, “...except to say that it will be more than one dollar and less than the Port Authority spent to acquire the property.”

Unconfirmed rumors put that purchase price in the neighborhood of \$500,000. Isn’t that the equivalent of a \$3 million subsidy? And if that’s the case, can’t the City require that the developer build to a higher TOD standard and commit to providing substantially more jobs? As Council members Helgen and Thune noted at last week’s public hearing, this suburban-style, one-story building does not belong in this key location within a quarter mile of a light rail station. It will be a terrible missed opportunity if the current site plan is allowed to go through.

Desnoyer Park and Union Park are eager to see development on this vacant lot, but we know we can do better -- much better -- than the current proposed site plan. We would be happy to work with the developers to plan for a more urban, TOD design, as envisioned by the St Paul Development Strategy and the Raymond Station Area Plan. Perhaps the Mississippi Riverfront Design Center could be enlisted to help address the as-yet-unresolved concerns that have forced the Union Park District Council to file this appeal on behalf of Desnoyer Park.

Please, I urge you to vote in favor of the Union Park appeal. You are our last hope to ensure a more forward-looking, higher density, job producing development for this valuable, transitional site. The 650 Pelham property sits within a ¼ mile of the Raymond station, and Pelham Boulevard is the sole connector for pedestrians, bicyclists and cars coming from Desnoyer Park and East River Parkway, to get to the new, billion dollar Central Corridor light rail line. We need to get this right to attract high quality businesses with good-paying jobs and set the standard for future development in the area between Desnoyer Park and the Raymond LRT station.

Thank you for your careful consideration of the issues being raised by those most directly affected by this proposed site plan for 650 Pelham Boulevard. Please vote to support the Union Park appeal.

Anne White
1731 Portland Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55104
awhitepho@gmail.com

Rec'd 10/11/11

Gentlemen,

I'm writing as a resident of Desnoyer Park, and in fact, I live right across the freeway from 650 Pelham. I want you to know that I support the Union Park Appeal. I would like something on the sight that reflects the changing nature of the neighborhood. I plan on attending the meeting tomorrow.

Thanks,

Tom Oswald
651/247-9813

Rec'd 10/12/11

Mr. Stark,

As a concerned Desnoyer Park neighbor I'm asking that you do the right thing and vote with your constituents who are, from my perspective, overwhelmingly opposed to the proposed site plan by an out of state developer.

I attended the City Council meeting last Wednesday which was enlightening.

I can only imagine the kind of pressure put on you by the Chamber of Commerce and The Port Authority who would like nothing better than to see this thing pushed through. Instead of claiming that the zoning is imperfect, and that it's the best fit for now is frankly playing both sides without make any real definitive stand for the neighbors who will be most affected by what eventually goes in at 650 Pelham.

The plan however is not in the best interest of our neighborhood with regard to jobs creation, multi-use, or even aesthetically. The land is only becoming more valuable. With a more thoughtful creative plan it could be something that is beneficial and embraced by not only the neighbors but something the Chamber and The Port Authority can be proud of.

Looking to the Future,

Ardis Houle

--

Ardis Houle, BS, CI & CT
Sign Language Interpreter
Disability Services Interpreting/Captioning Unit
Suite 180 McNamara Alumni Center
200 Oak Street S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455