

June 16, 2012

To Members of the Saint Paul City Council:

As long time residents of Lincoln Avenue, we have lived more or less amicably among St. Thomas students for many years. But we now fear that our neighborhood may become another Dinkytown, as we are about to have a rapid increase in student tenants. Fortunately the City can prevent this, and we write to express our support for two measures it can take. One is an ordinance to limit the density of homes converted to student rentals; the second is the denial of a permit for a privately-developed student dorm in the neighborhood.

First the ordinance: In the past few years we have seen a significant increase in conversion of single family homes to student rentals, especially on Lincoln Avenue. We are concerned about preserving the family atmosphere of our neighborhood and the value of our property. Research indicates that when student rentals reach 25 percent of homes, a tipping point occurs. Owners feel under seige and try to sell their homes and move. That is how student ghettos emerge in neighborhoods that were previously stable.

The proposed ordinance would require a minimum distance of 150 feet between student rentals. This is a modest tool providing no hardship to anyone—owners, renters, students, or landlords—that we believe would help preserve residential stability. We ask you to support the Student Housing Neighborhood Impact Overlay District.

Second, the private student dorm: In 2004 the University of St. Thomas(UST) and the neighbors agreed to a conditional use permit (CUP) limiting UST development such that the south side of Grand would be the buffer or transitional zone between UST and the neighborhood. The private developer who is proposing this student dorm for the benefit of UST students has purchased two properties currently housing about 12 students and plans to replace them with a five-story dorm that will house 80 students. The density of students on that one corner of Grand and Finn would be disastrous in terms of noise, traffic, pedestrians, and parking, and would block light, sight and air to homes on Lincoln Avenue as well as to the home immediately to the west on Grand.

This dorm is in our agreed upon transitional zone and is just across the alley from Lincoln Avenue homes. At 50 feet in height, it will tower over all other buildings at this end of Grand. Additionally, it exceeds all the CUP dimensions in terms of height and set backs that UST buildings on the north side of Grand would have to conform to. Even UST would not be permitted to erect a building of this scale; so in effect the dorm amounts to an outsourcing of its responsibility to the community.

Although the Zoning committee denied the proposal, the Planning Commission approved it without careful consideration in our view of the consequences to the neighborhood. They disregarded the Macalester Groveland Community Plan and applied the zoning code very narrowly and possibly in error. The zoning code for our area was written in the

1970s and does not address the construction of a private student dorm. The codes should not be applied to this proposed student dorm as if it were a traditional apartment building.

We are hopeful that the St. Paul City Council will give more careful consideration to these issues given the lengthy discussions and negotiations that have occurred for more than 10 years between the City, UST, the Macalester Groveland District Council, The West Summit Neighborhood Advisory Committee and the neighbors of both Mac-Groveland and Merriam Park.

We need approval of the ordinance to limit student rental density around UST and the denial of a permit for the private student dorm as currently proposed. Only then can we be assured that the neighborhood we love will be preserved for the advantage of current and future neighbors and for the University itself.

We ask for your careful consideration of these important issues keeping in mind that in order to maintain stable and diverse residential neighborhoods like ours we need your support for policies that would limit student density within the neighborhoods and maintain the transition zone between the UST campus and the residential blocks.

Sincerely,

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