

Dear Councilmembers,

We wish to thank you for drafting and promoting the student rental ordinance recently approved by the City Council. As a resident of Macalester-Groveland, it's nice to have some assurance that rental conversions can't continue at the breakneck pace they've seen in recent years. We recognize that the ordinance is a polarizing issue and that some homeowners and students don't like it, but something needed to be done to maintain balance and we are grateful to you for making this happen. We feel strongly this is a step in the right direction, but doesn't solve many of the issues we are still facing.

We are writing in support of a moratorium on development on Grand Avenue so that the study can be conducted on zoning in the area. Councilman Stark mentioned the need for a zoning study addressing future development of the west end of Grand. At that meeting in Spring 2012, Councilmember Thune remarked that the neighborhood was being poorly served by current zoning, and that a five-story structure intended entirely for students (i.e., a dorm, even if private) is an unanticipated and unfortunate outcome of outdated zoning. We couldn't agree more.

The Grand-Finn apartment/dorm is a done deal – this ridiculously large building will add 80 students to the block, and by our estimate DOUBLING the population on Grand & Lincoln between Finn and Cretin. This is to say nothing of the noise and overparking problems we anticipate based on current student rentals on our blocks. Loud talking and swearing late at night, big parties, party buses parked on the street playing loud music, and our new drunk neighbor pounding on our door and trying to get into our home at 3 am on a Saturday morning (not realizing he didn't live there) are some of the many issues we deal with WITHOUT adding an 80 person student rental building down the block. The developer has made it clear that he is not done dropping enormous private dorms on Grand. The arguments against the Grand-Finn complex made by Mac-Groveland residents (overwhelming size, parking density, noise), while falling short of demonstrating zoning violations, do show the intensity of the impacts the unit will have on our community. Adding additional outsized projects would, for all intents and purposes, add a block to UST's campus footprint and leave only an alleyway between it and its neighbors.

The point here is that a five-story apartment/dorm is legal under current zoning of west Grand and it shouldn't be. CUPs with UST, summary statements of neighborhood groups, even city planning documents all suggest that the residential character of the Mac-Groveland area south of UST is to be preserved and that a transition from UST's tall buildings to the neighborhood's 2-story homes must be maintained. As we saw at the council meeting, those good ideas and good intentions don't hold any weight. What is needed is zoning that does and can preserve the precarious balance between UST and its neighbors. Allowing yet ANOTHER outsized building on this block tips the balance, is out of character with all the rest of Grand Avenue (the next 5 story building is near Dale), and ridiculously overloads a small area of the neighborhood with a revolving population of students with little or no commitment to the neighborhood.

Councilmembers, we ask you to use your positions on the Council to ensure that zoning on west Grand is fully investigated, and to encourage changes to protect the neighborhood from further out-sized, out-of-character and out-of-control apartment/dorm complexes.

Sincerely,
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