

January 12, 2015

Councilmember Chris Tolbert
City of St. Paul
310-C City Hall
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102

Via E-mail:
Ward3@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Re: Paster Enterprises Redevelopment

Dear Councilmember Tolbert:

Much has gone on in this area over the past year and there are more exciting opportunities coming up in the future! I apologize for writing this letter anonymously however I do not want to risk my relationship in this community due to my views on this issue. I work with many groups in this area, know and work with the Paster family, have a stake in the neighborhood and plan to be here for many years to come.

I have some very major concerns about the proposed redevelopment along W. 7th Street and feel that it really is being stuffed down our throat with no options but agree with us to redevelop what we want or live with what you have.

I would like to point out that there are two positive elements of this proposal however both could be achieved through a makeover and lease-up of the property:

- 1) New retail; and
- 2) Capital improvement in the neighborhood.

There are several reasons many of us are against this type of redevelopment:

- 1) There will be no retail for more than a year in this part of Highland. With thousands of residents, many of whom have no transportation, this will cause a severe hardship for many.
- 2) All of the residents that will occupy the apartments they are proposing will enter only off of Davern. This road is not made to handle hundreds of more cars each day.
- 3) The 50+ employees currently employed by the businesses of Sibley Plaza, will be out of work. Even the Union Rep for Cooper's employees attended one of the District Council meetings to plead for the jobs that will be lost.
- 4) The clinic will close. This is a VERY important amenity to this community.

- 5) Dan Greenberg, the owner of the 7th Street Tavern has been in this business since 1998. He has been successful and runs a very good bar & grill. It will be a true shame to eject him from this neighborhood that he has put so much into. In the same manner, Cooper's Foods is a locally owned family business that has served neighborhoods since 1917, and the West 7th neighborhood for more than 15 years. How is it that there is no room to welcome back these long term neighborhood partners? How can we stand behind Paster and allow them to treat our long-term community members this way? If we do, why would anyone invest anything in this neighborhood in the future?
- 6) While I prefer the convenience of drive-thrus, this neighborhood is and should continue to be a walking neighborhood. Leaving the current zoning and allowing a redevelopment that allows all the parking in the front, does not fit with the overall City of St. Paul plan or the original intention of the Shepard Tavern Task Force when they set out to rezone this area.
- 7) Who needs a fitness facility? Paster's proposed housing development will have it's own workout facility, as does all the apartment communities in the area. What is the plan for a replacement tenant when LA Fitness closes it's doors. Remember, not even a nice, convenient, inexpensive Anytime Fitness could drum up enough business to stay open. And Anytime Fitness is the #1 Ranked Fitness Franchise!

There are several questions and thoughts that should still be considered before the City Council votes on this rezoning:

- 1) Why didn't Paster offer more than one (1) option?
- 2) Of course Paster has received neighborhood support; they have allowed Sibley Plaza to become rundown by not making any capital improvements and they have allowed the retail opportunities to become very limited due to non-renewal of leases and no new leasing activity. They alone have made Sibley Plaza the way it is. Has this been part of the plan the last several years so that nobody would oppose their new development?
- 3) The reasons for the change can easily be met through a facelift and lease-up.
- 4) The Highland District Council may have approved leaving the zoning as B2, but from what was said at the District Council meetings, it seems that they felt they really didn't have a choice. A redevelopment is better than what is there. But why no options? From the notes I've read from the Neighborhood Planning Committee, Gaus over emphasized the thoughts of the Task Force. Before the Committee took a vote, it should have been mentioned that some were not in favor of leaving the zoning. I sat in on many of the Task Force meetings; leaving the zoning as B2 was not a unanimous decision. I attended the Planning Commission meeting and it seems that Ochs and maybe others were leaning toward changing the zoning to T3, which is consistent with what the City is doing elsewhere. I believe everyone is going along with the ONLY option because it appears this is what the neighborhood wants. In fact, Melanie McMahon who also sits on the Highland District Council voted NO at the Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting.

- 5) Paster has been misleading about the size, scope, options, etc., from day one. They leak just a little information here and there, as it suits their needs. And the article in the Pioneer Press today, stating that Sibley Plaza won't be rezoned, seems to announce a decision that has not been made yet. The City Council meeting is still 10 days away! This begs the question of who planted the storyline that makes it appear it's a done deal.
- 6) There are many more neighbors against this idea, than what is being represented to the commissions, committees, and now the City Council. Of course many people are for ANYTHING being done with Sibley Plaza, since Paster has allowed it to become such a rundown eyesore. But if there was an option offered, I believe our community would prefer a facelift and lease-up to what is going to be proposed by Paster.
- 7) Since the plan of the City is to move to Traditional Neighborhood zoning, why is an exception being made for one developer? Why shouldn't the developer have to step up like all the others and offer proposals and options that meet the zoning requirements?
- 8) Imagine if the current property were updated and was filled with our familiar family friendly stores as well as many new tenants vs. a complete tear down, which would disrupt hundreds of people's lives and cause hardships to many.

There really are options out there and I don't believe any of them are being researched or truly considered. Paster has only ever offered the one option and said at a Highland District Council meeting that it was either their way or nothing at all. Basically, if we don't agree to leave the zoning as B2 so they can redevelop that one plan, then we will just have to live with what is there. I don't like being held hostage and I don't like the neighborhood being stuck with a development that doesn't fit into the traditional neighborhood plan that will make our City more walkable, friendly and like a true neighborhood.

I am hopeful you will take some time to consider these thoughts before the City Council votes in the next couple of weeks. I know I am not alone; if you or your staff has time to contact some of the neighbors and business owners, I am confident you will find many more like myself. Unfortunately, not everyone has time to attend community meetings and keep on top of everything that is going on. So while those that are for this redevelopment will say there has been plenty of time for input, I guarantee that had there been more than one option presented, there would have been more community input and interest, especially if the consequences had been fully represented.

Sincerely,

A Concerned Long-Time Neighbor and
Active Member of Our Community