

My name is Rick Varco. Since 2002, I have lived at 2265 Youngman Ave., Unit xxxxx and I have lived in St. Paul for most of my life. I write to oppose changing the zoning of my Shepard Davern neighborhood from the current RM2 to T2.

The proposed zoning change would limit the potential supply of housing units in St. Paul, and thus, make housing more expensive. The city of St. Paul should not make housing less affordable, especially at a time when so many working families struggle to make ends meet and housing is such a large part of any family budget.

Like any economic good, the cost of housing is determined by supply and demand. Unless, St. Paul decides to reduce demand by making the city a less desirable place to live, the city can only make housing more affordable by increasing the supply. Given that there is a physical limit on the surface area of the city, realistically, the housing supply can expand only by growing vertically through taller buildings with more units.

The proposed change from RM2 to T2 would reduce that maximum height limit for new construction in my neighborhood. Lower height limits restrict the ability to build taller structures with more units on a given section of land. Since the city has a finite amount of land on which to build, lower height limits mean fewer housing units can be built. As more and more people seek to live in St. Paul, developers will have an incentive to build taller buildings that house more people. Without these new units, more buyers chasing a static number of housing units will simply drive up the cost. The new lower height limits in the proposed T2 zoning will prevent this possible new construction and thus make future housing costs more expensive.

When I was looking to buy a home, single family homes in Highland were far out of my price range. Even for a relatively affluent consumer like me, a unit in a multi-family building was the only way I could afford to live in Highland. It would be wrong for me and others to use zoning to restrict the ability of future residents to find the same affordable option.

It is especially counter-productive to restrict the housing supply in Shepard Davern, given plans for the Riverview Corridor transit project. Various government agencies plan to invest heavily in a mass transit project to connect the Airport/Mall of America with Union Depot/Downtown St. Paul. Mass transit is most useful to those who can walk to a transit stop. There is little point in building mass transit, if you do not let people live within walking distance of it. Limiting the number of people in our neighborhood limits potential riders and beneficiaries of a massive transit investment. If we cannot replace single family homes with multi-family units, the neighborhood will have no way to house potential riders of the Riverview Corridor project.

While I respect the work of my neighbors on the Shepard Davern Area Zoning Study, I fear that any process based on neighborhood input will prioritize the immediate economic interests of incumbent property owners over the general public interest in more affordable housing and the interests of those who would want to live in hypothetical future construction.

St. Paul can't be a great place to live if we intentionally make it harder for more people to live here. Please reject the proposed zoning change.

Rick Varco  
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