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May 3, 2016

Russ Stark, President of the Saint Paul City Council
c/o Sherry Moore, City Clerk
310 City Hall
15 Kellogg Blvd. W.
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Re: APC 16-2: Appeal by Nova Classical Academy of a Planning Commission decision to uphold the Planning Administrator approval of changes to Victoria Park Master Plan

Council President Stark,

I am writing in opposition to Nova Classical Academy's appeal, and in support of the Planning Administrator's decision to amend the Victoria Park Master Plan and the Planning Commission's vote to uphold this decision. The consensus of the Zoning Committee, which I chair, and the Planning Commission are that there is no legal grounds for denial of the master plan amendment and that there were no errors in the decision-making process of the Planning Administrator in this matter.

The school administration and parents of Nova Academy students raised concerns regarding parking and traffic issues. There is however, no nexus between the proposed master plan amendment and these concerns. It appears instead, that the existing issues of traffic congestion and limited parking are a result of inadequate planning on the part of Nova Academy itself. With its only off-street parking consisting of a Park Board owned lot shared by a soon to be developed 30 acre park, and with little accommodation for student drop-off, there can be no surprise that a school with a major percentage of its student enrollment commuting from outside the city of Saint Paul, may experience difficulties during short periods of time during the beginning and end of the school day.

Victoria Park is an urban neighborhood along a transit corridor between downtown Saint Paul and the airport. It has a T3 zoning classification, one of the densest classifications in the city. This zoning was in place from the inception of Victoria Park. A zoning designation that Nova Academy utilized for its own development. It is not reasonable to expect low-density housing to occur when the market has not supported such development during the past 10 years. The city should be encouraging density in this area rather than looking backward to the remnants of a Master Plan that is no longer viable. Higher density supports a stronger tax base and greater vitality, offering the city with opportunities to redevelopment brownfield sites and to create parks and neighborhoods like Victoria Park.

Specific details of any proposed development on the subject parcel are best left to the Site Plan Review process where conformance with city regulations can be assured. There is no guarantee that a project developed under the existing master plan constraints would have less impact upon the adjoining school, especially given the fact that a forty foot tall structure may currently be constructed, as-of-right, along the entire adjoining property line, a mere six feet from the existing school building.

Please reject this appeal and support the measured and thoughtful expertise and experience of the city's Planning Administrator, planning staff, and members of the Planning Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Gaius G. Nelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gaius" being more prominent and stylized than the last name "Nelson".

Gaius G. Nelson

Cc: Bill Dermody
Council Member Dai Thao
Council Member Rebecca Noeker
Council Member Chris Tolbert
Council Member Amy Brendmoen
Council Member Dan Bostrom
Council Member Jane L. Prince