

From: Joel Nagel [mailto:joel.d.nagel@gmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, June 17, 2018 9:37 PM
To: *CI-StPaul_Contact-Council <Contact-Council@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Subject: Re: Public Hearing File# 18-071096 Property: 617 Laurel Ave

My name is Joel Nagel. My family has lived at 610 Laurel Ave for the past 20 years.

I do not understand how anyone could think that building a six unit structure at 617 Laurel is in the best interest of the neighborhood. I do not understand why this committee would approve the variance over the concerns of the neighbors. I do not understand why this committee would approve the variance for a developer who does not live in the neighborhood, does not even live in St. Paul, and does not have the best interest of the neighborhood in mind.

Congestion in this area of the city is a problem. There are too many multi-unit structures on this block already. Traffic congestion on Dale is a nightmare. Traffic accidents are a common occurrence. Mississippi Market has had to reconstruct their fence three times in the past year because cars have destroyed sections. Crossing Dale is already extremely dangerous at Laurel and Ashland. Putting six additional units on Dale will make an awful situation worse.

I can only assume that this committee did not fully understand the current situation when they voted to approve the variance. Please do not make that mistake again.

Sincerely,

Joel Nagel
610 Laurel Ave

We write to you today to express concern about a proposed six-unit rental building at 617 Laurel Ave, which requires significant and multiple variances from the City's zoning and building codes. We believe the Board of Zoning Appeals erred in its approval of the variances (April 23rd, MN File 18-071096), and ask for your support of the appeal filed by Joseph Rittman to reverse the Board's approval, which comes before the Saint Paul City Council on June 20 (agenda# 41, file# ABZA 18-4).

Although we object to many aspects of the property requiring code variances, we want to focus on one serious concern: Motorist and pedestrian safety. The signers of this letter represent the board of a small condominium association, Hawthorne East, located four doors east of the proposed development at 593 Laurel Avenue. Living very near the property in question, we have first-hand experience of the risks associated with using the alley that borders the property on the north side. The proposed building and parking lot will push very near to the boundaries

of the property, significantly reducing the safety of motorists and pedestrians using the alley, sidewalks and section of Dale Street near the property. Because our garages are located on the alley, owners and residents of our condo regularly exit and enter at Dale, which is already risky. The heavy traffic typical to Dale Street in this area and also the limited sightlines, the staggered cross streets, the steady stream of vehicles moving in to and out of the Mississippi Market and the Nice Ride bicycle docking station across the street currently require extra surveillance and caution when entering and exiting the alley. At the request of several residents, a no parking sign was posted on Dale Street further back from the alley to improve the sightlines of cross traffic (see attached photo). Building a parking lot that is only one-foot from the line where the alley and property meet and that comes within a few feet of the existing sidewalk as well, more than undoes the minimal improvements provided by the extended no parking buffer along the alley egress. (Another site-specific variance to consider?)

We appreciate that Zoning Appeal Board Member Maddox visited the site and noted that “traffic was crazy”, according to the May 21 board minutes. Not everyone can visit the project site so we included several pictures with this letter that we hope illustrate the problems that will result from shoe-horning six units and six parking spots into “this little piece of land” (Board Member Trout-Oertel, May 21 minutes). The first photograph shows our condo board members lined up at arms-length, to demonstrate the very shallow depth of the property. We also lined up across the alley to give you a sense of how tight the alley is with the adjacent property to the north. (Where will the snow go when it is plowed?)

As residents of Saint Paul, we are very aware of the pressing need for additional housing units. The Council’s and the Mayor’s efforts to spur housing development is applauded. Our block is currently a healthy mix of single and multi-family housing, owned and rented, with a very broad range of values, including income-restricted townhomes a block over. We are not opposed to development of the 617 Laurel lot, but we are very concerned about the density of the proposed Hupp LLC six-plex and the safety issues it poses. Compromising safety— including many aspects we did not describe in this letter – is not necessary to increase the number of housing units available in the City. Nor is it prudent. The people in this neighborhood, especially the individuals and families who would live in the proposed six-plex, would be left to struggle with housing that is crammed into a too-small parcel, too close to a very busy street and alley. Will the nurse whose husband testified to the Zoning Appeal Board that she helped tend to victims of three separate traffic accidents near Selby and Dale, be called on to do more because the safety concerns related to this project were brushed aside?

Thank you for your work on the Council representing the interests of the residents and businesses of Saint Paul. If you would like any additional information, please contact Claudia Brewington at 651 245-5109.

Sincerely,

Claudia Brewington

Owner, resident at 593 Laurel Avenue (Hawthorne East Condos)

Signing on behalf of and with the consent of the following Hawthorne East Condominium Association Board officers:

Luiz Vinholi, Director

Carol McElroy, President

Dery Vinholi, Treasurer

Mary Beth Neitzke, Secretary

Dear Council Members,

I own a property at 643 Laurel and was hoping to attend today's hearing regarding Joseph Rittman's appeal of variance approvals for a proposed project at 617 Laurel. Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend in person. I hope my thoughts and support for Mr. Rittman's appeal are in time to be considered. I responded to Jerome Benner regarding two previous notices of appeal by the company proposing the project. To save time, they'll serve as my opinion regarding this appeal.

Sent regarding the April 20 hearing:

My objections are the same as they were in my response [to the notice of the March 26th hearing]. To condense my thoughts: A company, whose sole interest in our neighborhood is profit potential, would like to build a project that, given the amount of space available, has too many dwelling units by a factor of three. The building needed to accommodate this excessive number of units will not leave enough room for the required minimum number of parking spaces in an area where street parking is already at a premium. The parking that can be squeezed in will require a reduction in each of two setbacks of nearly 90%, resulting in an unsightly and dangerous parking lot that nearly abuts the sidewalk in a historic district, no less. What precedent does granting these requests set for future proposals? If multiple and layered variance requests are granted, why do we bother to have zoning ordinances in the first place?

Sent regarding the March 26 hearing:

A primary concern is parking. As far as I'm aware, the parking requirement for multi-family properties is 1.5 spaces for two bedroom units (the letter didn't specify the average number of bedrooms, so I'm assuming two) and according to St Paul documentation for parking area design this would require a parking area of 81 x 38 feet. According to the Ramsey County property map, the lot is 6899.9 square feet and 40 feet wide, making the lot 172.5 feet deep. This would effectively leave a 91 x 40 (3640 sq ft) area to construct six units, not counting setbacks. Is that even possible? It doesn't seem practical, even if all units are one bedroom, making the width of the required parking area 54'.

Even if the requirement for parking is met, the average number of cars per household in the Twin Cities is two, which would likely mean more cars on neighboring streets, which are, based on observation over the past twelve years, at capacity. If the parking requirement is somehow avoided, then the parking demands would create a considerable hardship for the many people for whom on-street parking is a necessity.

Apart from the parking issue, I'm sure my neighbors and anyone interested in preserving the character of St. Paul would agree that this type of construction is not consistent with the character of the neighborhood. Coupled with the increased population density, it would, without a doubt, negatively impact the neighborhood's aesthetics and livability. To grant a out-of-state corporation [a Minnesota address for the company appeared only on the second appeal notice] multiple variances to make it possible for them to shoehorn a six-unit modern building into one of our irreplaceable historic districts seems absurd and objectionable for obvious reasons.

Finally, a decision to deny this request would be consistent with arguments leading to recent regulation of short term rentals in St Paul, which cited crowding and parking pressure as primary concerns. All of us who have made our home here and have significant investments in our properties can be grateful that we have zoning authorities who are committed to preserving the character and livability of our neighborhoods.

Thank you for considering my opinions.

Best Regards, Carl Christensen

