

## **Re: Public Comment on the 2495 Kasota Avenue Development Project**

March 1, 2020

To Members of the St. Paul City Council:

I am writing to protest the City's plan to allow for the development of the Kasota Ponds property (2495 Kasota Avenue, Saint Paul), which includes a small constructed wetland. I live in St. Paul, not far from the property. Despite the fact that this is not a pristine site, it has been an important area for urban wildlife, and for the people of St. Anthony Park. Community members have made a significant effort over the years to keep this property healthy. Their present concerns about the development of this site do not appear to have been fully considered.

As a retired federal and state environmental professional, I am aware that only a tiny percentage of native wetland acres remain in the southern portion of Minnesota. I am also aware that many kinds of wildlife habitats are under threat due to human development activities. Because people have either degraded or destroyed wildlife habitat to such a significant degree, all vestiges of open space and habitat have become important for wildlife, especially pollinators, songbirds, and waterfowl. The diversity of wildlife known to frequent the Kasota property is, therefore, not inconsequential.

In North America, over the past 50 years, we have lost 30 percent of our bird populations, mostly as the result of human activities. Scientists consider this to be a crisis for bird species. As such, every bit of habitat protection matters. Small areas - even when impacted by previous development activities - have some value, especially when we combine them with native plantings in yards, and the existing river corridors, lakes and streams in the area. If this wetland site could be protected--and restored, its value to wildlife would only improve.

I ask that the city staff and City Council seriously consider the impact of the proposed development on this site. It is time to think more broadly about its value, looking beyond how its development will help one property owner and the City coffers. It is time to consider the ecosystem services that wetlands and open space offer to the greater community as well. This is a golden opportunity to protect one remaining vestige of our natural environment for current and future generations.

If there is doubt that protecting a small wetland area like this is important, please think again. In my small yard in St. Paul, we have endeavored to create habitat for birds, and have been richly rewarded. Over the years, we have counted at least 58 species of songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl. And these are only the ones we have noticed. If this is true for my small yard, the Kasota Pond site is undoubtedly providing important habitat for many more birds, some of which have populations in steep decline, such as warblers and red-winged blackbirds.

Pollinators are also endangered species in Minnesota and nationwide. They are endangered because we only see projects in isolation, and do not adequately consider the cumulative impacts of our actions. We have reached a point with biodiversity that every habitat we can maintain matters now. An acre here and an acre there adds up to saving threatened or endangered species. Before allowing

the destruction of this natural area, a wildlife assessment should be conducted so that its value can be completely understood.

Once this area is gone, it's gone for good. Imagine instead, if the city had the foresight to save this property, allowing for its acquisition as a park or tiny refuge. Also imagine that funds could be raised (public and private) to restore and improve the property. Many of the most precious parks around the country have been saved by citizens that banded together to save them when no one else seemed to care. It is time to work collaboratively with your fellow citizens to find innovative ways to save, and not destroy the few remaining green spaces inside our city limits - even if they *are* imperfect. Your actions to protect this property could leave a lasting legacy for the people of Saint Paul, as well as for the survival of our bird species and other important wildlife upon which we all depend.

Respectfully,  
Lynne Kolze  
501 Frontenac Place  
Saint Paul, MN 55104

**From:** Abigail Crouse <[crouse.abigail@gmail.com](mailto:crouse.abigail@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 4, 2020 12:20 PM  
**To:** #CI-StPaul\_Ward4 <[Ward4@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:Ward4@ci.stpaul.mn.us)>  
**Subject:** Branston St. Parking

I'm writing to express my support for the appeal that will be discussed tonight at the City Council meeting related to Luther Seminary's proposal to expand parking on Branston St. I live on Branston St. and I am concerned about additional traffic and the safety of children if Luther Seminary's proposed parking lot expansion occurs. Children play on the playground at monkey island (in the middle of the divided street) and also ride bikes on the street. Adding more traffic to the street takes away from the safety of those kids. In addition, particularly in winter, the route to the parking lot is very narrow. I worry that there will be more accidents with parked cars if more traffic is funneled onto the street. Luther is a good neighbor, but this is not the right location for expanded parking.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Abigail Crouse

Dear Council Members:

We were in attendance at the City Council hearing on March 4 for the appeal of the Kasota development.

We are homeowners on Gordon Avenue — 1500 feet as the crow flies from the Kasota Avenue site — as of last May, and we are expecting our first child in June.

Many aspects of this development trouble us deeply, but none as much as the probable release of decades of accumulated toxins from any construction work on the site. We are not against development in principle, and like many of our neighbors would like to see a business such as Rohn grow and contribute to our tax base so that it remains possible and indeed attractive for a young family like ours to choose to reside within city limits.

However, in learning about how the city's planning approval process allowed a virtually unprecedented tiebreaker to override substantial community concerns (including those of numerous experts resident in the neighborhood), the missing record on the history of pollution at the site, the fact that development at this exact site had in fact been rejected by the City Council in the past on grounds of unacceptable levels of pollution, we fear that we find ourselves not residing in the most livable city in America, but a city where climate policy is toothless, where corporate interests outweigh those of a well informed and involved citizenry, and where our ever increasing property tax rates do not guarantee us clean air or clean water.

We have deep concerns about whether we will be able to take our infant out for walks safely this summer, whether it will ever be safe to garden, whether we would want our child to attend the local daycare and elementary school with potentially unenforceable environmental standards — ultimately, whether we would want to continue to make St. Paul home at all.

Anna Graber & Perry So

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