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<PED-ZoningCommitteeSecretary@ci.stpaul.mn.us>

cc: Council Member Rebecca Noecker <Ward2@ci.stpaul.mn.us>

Re: 695 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN
(21-271-810 695 Grand Rezoning)

Dear Zoning Committee:

I am a retired lawyer who has lived on St. Albans Street South between Summit and Grand for over 40 years.

The requested variances for 695 Grand represent not an ordinary “adjustment” of applicable rules and regulations, but a complete policy change for what kind of real estate development is permissible on Grand Avenue.

The East Grand Avenue Overlay District (EGAOD) limitations were thoughtfully and carefully adopted, some say in response to an inappropriate and much disliked structure at 745 Grand Avenue. Now, a developer wants to inflict greater damage on our neighborhood than 745 Grand ever did.

In the midst of the worst pandemic in 100 years a local landowner who allied with a large developer, is now attempting to overwhelm the neighborhood with a massive structure that in no way complies with the EGAOD limitations. Their “public meetings” were held only by Zoom calls, which, while said to be legally adequate, did not permit everyone in the neighborhood to participate nor to express their opinion and did not in any way allow for the full expression of viewpoints of the people who live closest to the project. It is not right and clearly violates our fundamental American notions of due process and fairness/equity to allow major policy matters decisions to be made or changed, with the public having only been allowed access via a much restricted Zoom meeting.

I am old enough to be aware that in an earlier decade, idealistic and educated planners and government officials brought forth something called Urban Renewal, and that policy, though lauded at the time, was later recognized as having wrought much ugliness on many communities and, as we now know, even the destruction of some vibrant neighborhoods, such as our own Rondo Avenue. Let’s not repeat the worst of Urban Renewal under the guise of policies of “densification” and “urbanization” and “environmentalism.”

I request that you Respect and Follow the Rules: kindly perform your assigned task of protecting and enhancing the neighborhoods in our City by respecting and following the rules and only make alterations and grant variances after traditional and far more appropriate

opportunities for public participation, including comments, questions and discussions in a professionally moderated environment.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Richard Keller

PS I believe that people in this neighborhood do not oppose development of the 695 Grand Avenue site as long as it complies with existing rules and regulations, in particular, the East Grand Avenue Overlay District limitations. Almost all of us support the development and construction of more housing within the City (for example, the condominiums on Grand near Oxford, known as “Oxford Hill,”) but only in the way that St. Paul has traditionally done so: carefully, thoughtfully, listening to and respecting the voices of both the immediate as well as the extended neighborhood.