

15JULY2021. Written Draft of Proposed 2-Minute Presentation on 695 Grand Avenue Rezoning

Good afternoon. I am Ted Lentz, a registered architect, homeowner in Summit Hill, whose family has lived at 692 Summit Ave since 1973 . In the mid-1970's I served as a Summit Hill Assn. Board member and three years as project director for the community non-profit Old Town Restorations working with multiple community groups. That work included directing a National Endowment for the Humanities grant focused on developing commercial properties in the Historic Hill District .

While the community is more prosperous now it seems that St. Paul City staff are once again being pressured to say yes to any development at any cost to neighbors. But now not in an attempt to rescue a declining neighborhood but to permit a suburban developer's vision of success that will exploit and destroy a successful residential/commercial area of St. Paul. History repeats itself.

The current building at 695 Grand, a suburban style supermarket was constructed in the late 1960's when the city of Saint Paul felt anxious for any development. The one story 20 foot brick clad concrete block building is inappropriate for Grand Avenue. From the large parking lot that takes over the corner to the loading dock on the alley and the narrow side yard west setback, it's a bad building.

It should not be replaced with another bad building. One that, due to his hulking scale, would be even worse for the neighborhood. The community negotiated zoning amendments, East Grand Avenue Overlay was developed to prevent inappropriate scale & site planning of buildings.

Frequent citation of the six-story building at Grand and Grotto seems ironic to those of us who remember when this tower at Grotto and Grand generated such substantial losses for the successful Minneapolis based developer that this, their first project in St. Paul, became their last project in St. Paul.

The first job of the St. Paul Zoning staff should be to enforce the zoning code. The East Grand Avenue Overlay District on this B-2 property, the current zoning code, should be retained & enforced.

This past June I sent a letter citing a number of variances that I believed, in my professional experience, that the city was overlooking. These include a variance for the loading dock which is supposed to be provided on site. These include setback variances for Saint Albans, which is required to match the block per the traditional neighborhood design standards. These are the shadow setbacks and step back's that are supposed to protect residential neighbors from being encroached on by tall structures. These are not being followed.

I did not yet get a written response from city staff.

The staff report came out yesterday expecting a response today. So today I steal value time from other clients to write this note in opposition to the current proposal for T-3 Zoning plus multiple variances.

Please enforce the zoning rules. They were carefully developed over a period of time by experienced community residents and city staff in open meetings where all views could be considered and honored. No true plight to the landowner is caused by this zoning of this large level site. It could easily be developed under the current zoning, or under the traditional neighborhood to zoning that is supported by the Summit Hill plan. There is no legal basis for the variances or the conditional use permit, which will have such extreme and adverse impacts on the immediate neighborhood and grand Avenue as a whole.

This small site of less than one acre, on a corner with three (B) lanes of car traffic and the mostly empty Grand Avenue bus stopping a city block away should not be approved for all of the St. Paul Zoning variances that are requested.

No variances, no conditional use permit. Please listen and support actual neighbors not anonymous faces or former residents that have moved out of Summit Hill to greener pastures. There is a better way forward.

TED LENTZ, AIA