

St. Anthony Park Community Council/District 12
P.O. Box 8124
Saint Paul, MN 55108



To: Saint Paul City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102

June 27, 2023

Re: FILE #: 23-035038 — 2285 Hampden LLC (c/o Thomas Nelson, Exeter Management LLC)

Dear Council President Brendmoen and City Council Members,

The St. Anthony Park Community Council supports building affordable housing in our neighborhood, particularly with a goal of an average AMI of 60% or lower, with a high number of two- and three-bedroom homes, as appears to be the case with this project. We are satisfied that this use, in the current economic environment, is best-suited to this site, which has been vacant for about five years.

Currently, more than 250,000 square feet of commercial space listed as Industrial/Flex Use is vacant within one-half mile of the site. Requiring 80% of the first floor to be commercial space ignores economic viability. Although one goal of the Industrial zoning category is to “be supportive of well-paying jobs” as stated in the BZA Staff Report, this is not being achieved for nearly 10 acres of empty space at the moment. It is conceivable that providing affordable housing for people who could fill some of those well-paying jobs would benefit Saint Paul’s economy better over the long run, as they build savings and move up to home ownership.

Because the site is on Hampden Avenue, we have some trepidation about the livability standard for residents because of the heavy truck traffic they will experience on a daily basis, given our research on this topic.(1)

However, we also know that any new commercial or industrial use at this site could also increase truck traffic in the neighborhood for existing residents, and so creating more affordable housing is the better choice, since residents come and go less often than business users and do not create more over-sized vehicle traffic.

Among the variances requested, we do not favor the existence of the surface parking lot, though we understand the developer’s rationale for it. If a surface lot is actually necessary for the commercial space and the housing offices, we would prefer the lot to be smaller. The building and its residents, we believe, would be much better off with green space in that location, since green space is lacking in that immediate area. The building is only three blocks outside of the Raymond Station area, and especially with the completion of a pedestrian and bike path north-south between Carleton Street and Long Avenue, it could have excellent non-motorized connection to the Green Line (the “Carleton Extension”). It also is less than 1,000 feet from a well-stocked grocery store. A moderately dense residential area abuts this site to the southwest.

Although we would like to see more green space in the plan, the early drafts of the proposed building show a setback that exceeds what is currently on the site. Two of the existing buildings meet the sidewalks. The neighboring building to the west is set back 9 feet from the sidewalk, which is consistent with what is being asked for in the present plan.

We have been concerned about the known contamination of soil and groundwater at the site, but the MPCA has determined “No Association” for a prior development plan at the site and has specified procedures that will minimize the risk of spreading contaminants during construction. There are reliable ways to prevent intrusion of vapors into the building, which undoubtedly will be required by the MPCA. Consequently, we agree that this location can be made safe for residential use and, for reasons stated elsewhere in this letter, that it will not pose a hazard to the families that will live here.

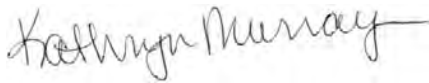
The development could help reduce the urban heat island effect of this industrial area by installing a reflective white roof or a green roof, which also would reduce stormwater runoff. Alternatively, with some 35,000 square feet of roof space and with current incentives for renewable electricity production, it would be financially feasible to install a solar photovoltaic array that produces far more than 100 kilowatts of energy. This, together with improved building insulation and energy-efficient HVAC and appliances, would reduce utility costs substantially.

The Staff Report argues that this property is “outside the Raymond Avenue Green Line Station Area” and therefore cannot be considered an acceptable conversion of land use as described in the West Midway Industrial Plan. As we point out above, this site is within easy walking distance (about 2000 feet) of the Green Line Raymond Station and many shops and restaurants, and it adds considerable population density (281 beds planned); we conclude that it fits the characteristics required for land conversion.

In closing, we hope our support for this project will allow for timely engagement about the design with the developer during the site plan process, if the project gets its initial approval.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Murray, Executive Director

kathryn@sapcc.org | 651-649-5992

www.sapcc.org

CC: Doua Yang, Ward 4 Legislative Aide

Thomas Nelson, Exeter Management, LLC

- (1) In September 2020, the SAPCC Transportation Committee counted heavy truck traffic at several key intersections in South St. Anthony Park, after community complaints about the effect of their sound and air pollution. We plan to replicate these counts at the equivalent days and times this fall for comparison.

One of the corners we counted was Raymond and Hampden Avenues, about two blocks east of the 2285 Hampden site.

At that corner, we recorded 22.5 heavy trucks *per hour* from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. on an average weekday, going east or west on Hampden to or from Raymond, which is more than one every three minutes. Note that this did not include any truck traffic originating/terminating in the industrial area north of Hampden that came from or went east on Hampden toward Vandalia/University.

That 22.5 trucks per hour number is almost identical to the number of trucks we counted around the same time on Territorial Road at Seal Street.

As Councilmember Jalali knows, SAPCC has written a letter to her and to Public Works about the effect of this heavy truck traffic on the residents along Territorial Road, many of whom live in affordable housing, such as Union Flats and Seal Hi-Rise.

Residents of both these buildings, in addition to the residents of the St. Anthony Greens townhouses along Territorial Road, express strong opinions about the negative effects of the incessant heavy truck traffic they live with every day.

St. Anthony Park Community Council/District 12
P.O. Box 8124
Saint Paul, MN 55108



To: Nicolle Goodman, Director
City of St. Paul, Dept. of Planning & Economic Development
City Hall Annex
25 West 4th Street, Suite 1300
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Re: Proposed Housing Project – 2285 Hampden Ave.

August 7, 2023

Dear Director Goodman,

The Land Use Committee of the St. Anthony Park Community Council once again discussed the proposed project at 2285 Hampden Ave at our August 3rd meeting. As before, we generally support the project and the affordable family housing that this brings to our neighborhood. We look forward to reviewing the final plans reflecting the zoning change suggested by the City, in hopes that we can issue a formal letter of support at that time.

In keeping with our Unified Design Standards, the one change from the previous plans that we would like to see is the elimination or relocation of the surface parking at the front of the building. We understand the desire for some limited parking to support the commercial spaces but hope that could be located under or at the ends of the building in order to create more green space for gardens, play space or lawn.

I've included our letter of support from the June variance request by Exeter. The process for this project to go through the City procedures has already been confusing and frustrating for all involved. It makes it particularly difficult to communicate timely updates for the purposes of community engagement as is our role as the District Council for this project area.

Please keep us apprised of the progress of the project and call with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathryn Murray".

Kathryn Murray, Executive Director
kathryn@sapcc.org | 651-649-5992
www.sapcc.org

CC: Starke Mueller and Roger Purdy – SAPCC Land Use Committee Co-Chairs
Thomas Nelson, Exeter Management LLC
City Council Member Mitra Jalali, Ward 4

Attached Document: *2023.06.27 Hampden Variance Appeal LOS.pdf*

RE: ZF# 23-075-366
ZF# 23-075-387
2285 Hampden Rezoning

Sept 6, 2023

Jill Peuranen
2301 Long Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55114

I urge the Board to deny rezoning and variances requested by the applicant, 2285 Hampden llc, which I'll refer to as 2285.

My comments highlight previous findings, St Anthony Park District Council concerns not addressed by staff report, corrections to facts stated in the application, and my comments. I've attached my previous comments to provide fact trail. Attachments are at end as links.

A) Previous Findings:

As you know, similar variances were applied for in late spring/early summer which the board fully rejected, for multiple reasons including more than use variance. David Eide authored the staff report for that hearing dated May 30, 2023. It's interesting to see how different people can view the same data and reach very different conclusions. In this staff report Anton Jerve reports findings met for requested variances while in May, David Eide reported findings not met regarding identical variance requests. To highlight a few:

- 1) Variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the zoning code-
 - a. Eide: **"The intent of mixed use standard not allowing principle residential uses on the first floor is to separate residential units vertically from surrounding commercial and industrial uses". This finding is not met....**
 - b. Eide: Intention of %business on first floor....is in support of well-paying jobs.
 - c. Eide: **This primarily residential building would be in conflict with the intent of the industrial district.**
 - d. Eide: "The Staff Report argues that this property is "outside the Raymond Avenue Green Line Station Area" and therefore cannot be considered an acceptable conversion of land use as described in the West Midway Industrial Plan.
- 2) Regarding the intent 25'setback variance

- a. Eide “the front yard parking and building setback requirements are to buffer industrial uses from residential.... It is reasonable to require the proper setback across the street and **these requests are in conflict with Section 60.103(o)** in the Zoning Code. **This finding is not met for the requested variances.**
 - b. Eide: “It is not clear why the applicant cannot alter the building and surface off-street parking facility to comply with the 25’ front yard setback in the limited portion of the lot where this requirement applies. **This finding is not met”**
- 3) Variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan.
 - a. Eide: “**A primarily residential structure conflicts with Saint Paul 2040 Comprehensive Plan Policy LU-46**, which encourages retaining and protecting current industrial land from conversions to residential or institutional. This **proposal conflicts with PO-1 in the West Midway Industrial Plan in the SPCP policy PI-1** ‘to retain and protect current industrial land from conversions to non-industrial uses’”.
 - b. The property is a vulnerable land use edge. Eide: “**Building and parking spaces in the front yard are contrary to SD 1-20 which states that landscaping shall be maintained and infilled along both sides of this edge.**” **This finding is not met.**
- 4) The practical difficulties, economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties
 - a. Eide: “Applicant states that they have tried marketing the property for 7 years for commercial uses, however, they have not had success. They state that lowering the amount of first level commercial space to align with market conditions is preferable and that if the required commercial space were constricted, it would be vacant. **Given these statements, it appears that the practical difficulties are primary economic in nature.**”

So again, it is interesting that the same data results in very different findings. It is up to you to decide this and I ask you to include these previous findings in your deliberation.

B) Saint Anthony Park District Council points not addressed by staff report:

In the letters 2285 included in this application, SAPDC raised concerns regarding traffic, lack of green space, front yard parking, mitigation of heat island.

From the file letter dated June 27, 2023:

- 1) "serious trepidation is raised regarding the substantial industrial traffic on Hampden Avenue and directly surrounding this proposed project"
- 2) "Because the site is on Hampden Avenue, we have some trepidation about the livability standard for residents because of the heavy truck traffic they will experience on a daily basis, given our research on this topic. (1)"
- 3) "We do not favor the existence of the surface parking lot. The building and its residents, we believe, would be much better off with green space in that location, since green space is lacking in that immediate area."
- 4) "The development could help reduce the urban heat island effect of this industrial area.... Alternately, with some 35,000 sq ft roof space and with current incentives for renewable electricity production, it would be financially feasible to install a solar photovoltaic array that produces far more than 100 Kilowatts of energy. This together with improved building insulation and energy-efficient HVAC and appliances would reduce utility costs substantially."

From the file letter dated Aug 7, 2023:

- 5) "In keeping with our Unified Design Standards, ... we would like to see the elimination or relocation of the surface parking at the front of the building.... In order to create more green space for gardens, play space or lawn"

I did not see any of these objections addressed within the staff report and ask you to seriously consider the District Council's concerns.

C. Corrections to 2285 application:

Proximity to light rail – Applicant misstates and misrepresents that the property is within the Raymond Station Area. It is not within the zone. Transit improvements highlighted do not exist.

- 1) Eide: "The Staff Report argues that this property is "outside the Raymond Avenue Green Line Station Area" and therefore cannot be considered an acceptable conversion of land use as described in the West Midway Industrial Plan.
- 2) Exeter: "The trend of development in the area **has been driven by proximity to the central corridor light rail line, other transit improvements, including new bike lanes along Raymond Ave, Carlton Steet and Long Avenue...**"

I live on Long Avenue. These do not exist. As far as I know, there is not an agreed plan in place for their creation or access agreements obtained from landowners involved.

- 3) There currently exists no easy direct path to the Raymond Station from development except through industrial land that is not well lit or well maintained.
- 4) Regarding Proximity to Green Line Station – Ridership is down substantially and attributed to safety concerns on trains, at and surrounding stations. A long walk down dark streets or alleys to the station from 2285 could be concerning.

D. My Comments:

I want to quickly highlight just 4 of my concerns. These primarily echo points raised in the previous staff report File# 23-035038, associated meeting notes, and Saint Anthony Park Community Council letters.

1) Practical difficulties are primarily economic in nature/Plight of the owner:

In deciding whether practical difficulties are primarily economic in nature, I ask you to consider 2285 Hampden's own words:

- a. Herb Tousley – “So we think it’s, you know, economically it throws the project out of whack to put in more commercial space. I think you just have to underwrite it as vacant and then all sudden your cost, and I know this is you guys don’t consider cost, but if you build a lot of space you can’t get rent on, that can kill a deal. It will kill a deal.” - Board of Zoning Appeals Hering Minutes transcripts dated May 30, 2023”
- b. Herb Tousley – “So when we’re looking at that space we’re somewhat underwriting like what if its vacant for five to ten years and you know what, what can, **how can we move it, a development forward and still not have it be cratered by the lack of income from a commercial space because that space is, it’s expensive to build and when we can’t get revenue from it, it puts a hole in the pro forma.**” - Board of Zoning Appeals Hering Minutes transcripts dated May 30, 2023”:
- c. “Denial of the requested variance that will allow the majority of the first floor to contain residential uses will result in either no development and continued “use” of the land with a vacant and boarded building, or (if it was even possible to get financing to build) a new building with what would inevitably have vacant commercial space on the first floor.” - Point 3 in Exeter’s current filing, Section Proposed Findings for Variance of Percentage of First Floor Residential Area:

This sounds to me like the difficulties are primarily economic in nature. 2285 argues that market factors become more than just “economic considerations” I don’t buy it. This sounds purely economic for the owner. I also counter that the Plight of the Landowner is their own doing rather than circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner. 2285 purchased and allowed the building to sit vacant this long and become in their own words “a long vacant and dilapidated property”.”

2) Mixed Use - 2285 and I1 or T1 zoning

As you all know, I1 mixed-use requires 80% ground floor commercial. IT Industrial requires 50%, applicant has proposed only 15%. I was deeply concerned by this apparent disregard or complete misunderstanding of the very definition of I1 mixed-use or of IT. At only proposed 15%, I believe it does not represent a good faith effort to meet the basic requirements of I1 or T1 and do not believe conditions were met to show reason for granting variance beyond Financial Hardship of owner, which I addressed above.

3) 2040 Plan

2040 comp plan stresses intention to retain and protect current industrial lands in addition to affordable housing within walking distance of light rail. **“It is vital to protect the industrial economy in a way that balances competing land uses while preserving industrial business growth”**

I fully support the urgent need for affordable housing, and I’m not saying current availability in any way meets demand. I also hold a huge spot in my heart for local independent business having worked for a local independent business alliance non-profit for over 8 years before retiring.

So I took a look the **New Dwellings Census Approved data set on information.stpaul.gov and counted at minimum 2,065 new units of high density housing within 1 mile of 2285 that have recently been completed. The vast majority have replaced industrial/commercial** although were not zoned I1. Most directly border the green line, while this proposed project does not.

I see the commitment to housing. Commitment to commercial/industrial can be harder to see.

My neighborhood needs affordable housing. My neighborhood also really needs the economic boost which the right project at 2285 could provide. Vacant industrial and commercial exists in the area but in what condition? I’ve seen local independent businesses forced out by conditions and lack of feasible, usable, affordable commercial and industrial properties. South SAP has

become a neighborhood of bedrooms and breweries. Economic diversity of improved commercial/industrial properties is strongly needed for economic vitality.

Lastly, Variance from 25' setback.

Applicant called out SDI's words "Hampden Avenue is a Vulnerable Land Use Edge calling for **improved buffering** as a **key tool** in reducing residential/industrial conflict". They followed it by trying to convince us all that their requested 9' setback rather than the required 25' was going above and beyond and they were doing a great thing.

I don't agree. By requesting a reduction of 16' for a residential building deliberately plopped into an industrial zone, I do not feel applicant respects the distinction of Vulnerable Land Use Edge or the health, safety, and well-being of their own future residents of the project.

This is a proposed project. There are no current residents to speak on the impact of a reduced setback. In the same letters provided for this meeting by the St Anthony Park Community Council, serious trepidation is raised regarding the substantial industrial traffic on Hampden Avenue and directly surrounding this proposed project. From the file letter dated June 27, 2023:

"Because the site is on Hampden Avenue, we have some trepidation about the livability standard for residents because of the heavy truck traffic they will experience on a daily basis, given our research on this topic. (1)"

My neighbors and I know directly and are speaking up for these future residents. 25' setback is crucial in providing these future residents some buffer in their front yard. Please consider their silent voices.

In the same letter, SAPCC also raised serious concerns regarding the lack of green space on this project. Maintaining the 25' required setback can alleviate some of this concern. 9' setback and a playground that looks to be the size of 2 parking spaces is not sufficient for the health and wellbeing of those residing in these proposed 281 beds.

In Summary

Applicant has shown that **all** properties directly north, south, east and west are industrial save a small swatch of affordable townhomes directly across Hampden Ave, which do have 25' setback. Hampden sees a large amount of industrial traffic. It lies within an industrial zone that I don't think anyone would describe as a pretty little suburban industrial park. Applicant (2285 *project architect Elkins if time*) described the property as "its **adjacent** neighbors are surface

areas that have chain link fences and barbed wire on top of them where they store tractor-trailers”.

Sounds appealing. So, what could help this project succeed long term?

What could help potential residents **choose** to move in, and more importantly, **to stay** and thrive long term? To not create a bigger problem further down the line?

The property offers a unique opportunity.

If done right, the required 25’ setbacks and a healthy complement of commercial tenants could convince potential residents to overlook the industrial downsides of the location and their other options, and choose 2285. Now if it had sustainable building practices, unique architecture, more soft surfaces, renewable energy, solar on the 35,000’ roof, and there was improved safety on the green line, it could be a true long-term solution to get excited about.

Why do I care?

I have owned my 100+ year home at 2301 Long for over 30 years. It is less than 300 feet from 2285 and I have direct sightlines to the project thanks to the affordable townhome’s parking lot across my back alley. My neighborhood has seen a lot of change, especially with the green line and I’ve watched as it has struggled to find itself and create a unique sense of place. I have benefited from many of the changes and have generally been a strong proponent of them. And support of local independent business is my way of life. It’s tricky. To balance housing and economic opportunities is essential. But lately it looks like we’re morphing into bedrooms and breweries. We need more.

To wrap up-

One change which really bothers me has been watching the owner of 2285 purchase it and then allow it to become, in their own words “a long vacant and dilapidated property”.

Additionally, a neighbor pointed out that the Property Tax lookup website lists 2285 Hampden as having Total Delinquent Taxes Due of \$21,113.99. I hope this is mistaken, but concerns me greatly regarding stability and longevity of 2285 Hampden, and direct negative impacts to my neighborhood. I feel somewhat put over a barrel. Approve this or we’ll let it continue to slide and become a bigger problem. Again, I hope I am mistaken.

2285 has potential for boosting the neighborhood economy and providing affordable housing, **if done right.**

With a creative outlook and due diligence, 2285 could show us their brilliance by coloring within the lines to bring us a project we could all get behind. Heck, lead by setting the gold standard for what I1 or T1 development could be.

As much as I would like to see something happen at 2285 Hampden, I cannot support this current project with the requested variances and ask you to please deny.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jill Peuranen
2301 Long Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55114

Elink Attachments:

Property tax payment record 2285 Hampden:

<https://beacon.schneidercorp.com/application.aspx?AppID=959&LayerID=18852&PageTypeID=4&PageID=8397&Q=929157122&KeyValue=292923420153>

Public comment I provided to previous hearings for stats and data trail: [22-051684 ABZA 23-1 comments Jill Peuranen.pdf](#)