



UNION PARK DISTRICT COUNCIL

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November 6, 2017

Tia Anderson
Department of Safety and Inspections
City of Saint Paul
375 Jackson Street
Saint Paul, MN 55101

Dear Tia:

The Union Park District Council Committee on Land Use and Economic Development convened a special meeting on October 30 to discuss the site plan for the proposed development at 1973/1977 Marshall Avenue. Property owner Jon Schwartzman and architect Paul Holmes presented on the project.

I have summarized the primary concerns and requests set forth by Committee and community members at the meeting. Thank you for the opportunity to share these issues with the site plan review team.

1. Building height

A primary request is to lower the overall height of the proposed five-story structure by one—or preferably two—stories. The prevailing reasons for this include the facts that:

- All of the multifamily residences in the area are a maximum of three stories; this proposed structure is much taller than other nearby buildings.
- The west elevation of the building as proposed is essentially six stories, exceeding the maximum allowable number of stories.
- There is concern that the building as submitted in the plans exceeds the maximum allowable height of 50 feet, both in building design and through the establishment of a new grade.
- In the City's Comprehensive Plan, Marshall Avenue is a medium-density residential corridor, which calls for a maximum density of 30 units per acre; the density of the proposed project is reportedly about 49 units per acre.

2. Balconies and window issues

The architect has acknowledged that the tenants of this property will be primarily—if not exclusively—college students. Accordingly, there is general consensus that the balconies should be removed from the plans for the following reasons:

- Noise impacts are of primary concern to the community. Excessive late-night noise from balcony use, exacerbated by their height, is anticipated.
- Balconies pose a safety issues as well as a greater likelihood for nuisance, such as thrown objects and urination off of them; neighbors in the area have experienced similar nuisances created by student rentals in the past.
- With the limited amount of storage provided within the building, there is concern that the balconies will become cluttered and unsightly.

The developer is also urged to replace the proposed vinyl windows with higher-quality energy-efficient non-opening windows to contain sound within the building.

3. Traffic and parking

With the number of tenants (not to mention visitors) at this property likely providing a net of at least 54 additional vehicles, a traffic study and traffic management plan are called for, focused on the Marshall and Moore intersection. With Four Seasons A+ Elementary and St. Mark's schools in the immediate vicinity, and frequent church traffic on weekends, there is a need to consider a marked crosswalk, pedestrian refuge median, rectangular rapid flashing beacon, and other types of traffic control at that intersection to ensure pedestrian safety and adequate left-hand turning movements.

There are also significant parking concerns. With 64 residents and 32 parking spaces provided, pressure on side-streets will be significant. Specifically, with respect to parking:

- There are concerns that if tenants must pay extra for off-street parking, that they will elect not to use it. Thus, the developer is urged to attach parking costs to the units.
- There are concerns about the adequacy of proposed off-street parking. For example, questions have been raised as to the legality of the separate garage structures (situated in the side yard, and violating set-back requirements) and the feasibility of the parallel spot in the main garage.
- Better bicycle parking options are also requested: outdoor bicycle parking is not secure in this area, and bicycle parking over vehicles in garage does not seem desirable.

4. Exterior appearance and finishes

There is strong sentiment that the proposed building is entirely out of character with the neighborhood. Primary requests include the following:

- The building's design should better match the historic nature of the neighborhood, with an early 20th century classic appearance.
- Recessed or set-back upper stories would reduce the monolithic appearance and break up the exterior façade; the EastRiver Apartments at 2320 Marshall was identified as an example of this.
- A primarily, if not exclusively, brick exterior would better comport with the neighborhood character; the Vintage development at 1555 Selby Avenue was identified as an example of this.
- Recessed windows with thresholds and reveals would give building design more relief.
- Higher quality and refinement of finishes overall is desired; there is a sense that student tenants will treat the property with more care if it is higher quality.

5. Other issues and concerns

Additional requests and concerns with consensus support include the following:

- A shadow analysis should be completed, and shade impacts on surrounding residences should be mitigated to the extent possible to preserve the ability to capture solar and grow vegetation.
- Trash and recycling must be adequately addressed and managed with minimal impacts to surrounding residences.
- Situating the rental management office on-site is supported, but the owner has indicated that it will also serve as the leasing office for his seven other rental properties. There is concern that this commercial-type use will be burdensomely intense and not allowed within RM2 zoning.

- The property owner must institute a robust security plan with adequate lighting, cameras, and other security measures.
- The property owner must have strong lease conditions with expectations and regulations related to quiet hours, nuisance issues, visitors, and over-occupancy.
- The contractor must share a construction management plan for demolition and development, and weekly communication on the project with designated neighbors and the district council.

There have also been concerns expressed about recent maintenance-based complaints lodged against this developer with respect other student-rental properties he owns, concerns that he has rented to students in violation of the student housing overlay, and concerns about his selection of a newly-graduated college student as the on-site manager of this housing complex.

6. Union Park District Council's ten-year plan

While likely more pertinent for the Planning Commission public hearing than for site plan review, there are numerous provisions of Union Park's Ten-Year Community Plan that apply to support the above requests. In its plan, the community has committed to:

- Preserve the well-kept, traditional feel and scale of the neighborhood (LU2), and preserve and improve the character of the neighborhood (H2).
- Ensure that new development fits within the character and scale of adjacent neighborhoods (LU2.3).
- Support multi-unit mixed-use development *in mixed-use corridors* (specifically, Marshall Avenue *between Snelling and Hamline* per LU3.2) that can accommodate higher density levels, while minimizing impacts on adjacent lower density areas, and discourage multi-unit housing uses that are incompatible with single-family residential areas (H1.1).
- Integrate historic significance into Union Park's housing and land use decision-making processes, supporting preservation over demolition (HP1) and encourage the continued use and rehabilitation of existing structures to preserve the historic character of residential and commercial districts (LU2.2).

And, the Plan mandates that "new residential construction shall be consistent with the character of the surrounding homes, while minimizing impact on the neighborhood." (H2.2a).

This project is the first major redevelopment along this stretch of Marshall Avenue in 50 years. The project's architect acknowledged that "bringing this higher density student use" will have a significant impact on the neighborhood. The City Council recently unanimously supported an interim ordinance putting a hold on such projects so that development can be done thoughtfully, in a way that meets our City's increased housing demand while preserving important historical assets and neighborhood character when possible. We request that City staff approach the evaluation of this project with those principles in mind.

Sincerely,



Julie Reiter, Executive Director, Union Park District Council