From: Ben <pickycat95@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 16, 2025 4:16 PM
To: #CI-StPaul_Ward3 <Ward3@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Subject: Highland Bridge Lot B Zoning Variance Request

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Think Before You Click: This email originated **outside** our organization.

Dear Councilmember Saura Jost,
Please refer to the attached letter in opposition to Ryan Companies' zoning variance requests and with a suggestion for a possible interim solution.

Thank-you for your consideration,
Ben Trousdale

2096 Bayard Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55116
612.825.8439

February 26, 2025

City Councilmember Saura Jost
310-C City Hall
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Councilmember Saura Jost,
Ryan Companies is in the process of appealing to the City Council the Saint Paul Board of Zoning Appeal's rejection of its requests for zoning variances for Lot B of the Highland Bridge development. I urge the City Council to uphold the Board's ruling and ask Ryan Companies to propose a different solution.

The most radical of the requests are the FAR variances that reduce the FAR for Lot B by about 50% and more for the 3 parcels with the one-story commercial buildings. A reduction of the FAR of this magnitude has been thoroughly vetted and found not to be in the long-term interest of the city. Ryan's primary motivation is founded in the current financial and rental development environment and jettisons some of the project's long-term goals. Their argument is larded up with other obstacles of varying degrees of difficulty; none are insurmountable. Ryan references the Highland District Council CDC's resolution in support of the zoning variance requests to buttress their case. I attended that meeting, and as a retired architect with experience in design and construction, it was clear that the committee did not understand that the constructability issues that can be readily solved with good civil engineering, landscape architecture, architecture and structural engineering design.

Ryan's approach to Lot B is shortsighted and echoes other decisions like using conventional heating and air conditioning instead of geothermal which has locked in decades of conventional fossil fuel HVAC.

The proposed, squat one story buildings are suburban strip mall ugly and look like they were designed by robo-architect channeling its inner Dickensian dystopian dreariness. The use of masonry outside walls suggests permanence yet strip mall buildings are inexpensive to build and demolish. It's the sense of permanence that misleads.

I propose a less permanent solution like an arcade, semi-enclosed and/or all-season building(s) with roll-up garage doors or similar movable outside walls, that can accommodate traditional retail, service and business enterprises. This could encourage start-ups and pop-ups that nurture economic diversity and growth. The buildings can be delightful in their design and aesthetic appeal and better engage the challenges the sloped site presents.

This approach could address Ryan's short-term need to 'build something' to create a return on their investment. It also creates interim tax revenue for Saint Paul. In the future, when conditions are favorable to fulfill the goals of the development, the structure(s) can be demolished, and mixed-use buildings can be built.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ben Trousdale

2096 Bayard Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55116
612.825.8439
Pickycat95@yahoo.com

From: Meg Duhr
To: *CI-StPaul_Contact-Council
Subject: Highland Bridge Variances and Planning Commission Decision
Date: Tuesday, February 18, 2025 2:49:47 PM

You don't often get email from megduhr@gmail.com. Learn why this is important

Good afternoon Councilmembers,

My name is Meg Duhr (223 Colborne Street, St. Paul, 55102). I am writing today to urge you to uphold the Planning Commission's decision to deny the Ryan Companies' variance requests to lower density and construct new commercial and residential spaces that contrast the vision and goals of the Highland Bridge Master Plan.

I understand that residential development is challenging right now in St. Paul, but a decision to return to the old ways of car-centric, low-efficiency land use is not the right call. We are in a climate crisis and compact, walkable communities with high-density living options are the only way forward when it comes to development in a space like the Highland Bridge.

Though I do not live in the Highland Neighborhood, I am just down the river in the West 7th area. This is a part of the city I frequent regularly and I want the city to stick to its plans. I would rather see the sites sit empty for another few years than have another strip mall constructed in Highland. Those are bad choices that we would have to live with forever. On the topic of planning, I follow planning and land use issues closely in my neighborhood, as Board Chair of our District Council, the West 7th/Fort Road Federation. There have been several major variance requests or significant departures from long-established small area plans and master plans for sites like the West Side Flats and the ADM/Island Station site at Randolph and Shepard. City staff seem to be rubber stamping approvals for whatever developers demand and I am encouraged that the planning commision overruled them.

I urge you to stick to the plans we have. Countless hours of community and staff input and expertise have gone into them. Please reject Ryan Companies appeal.

Sincerely,
Meg Duhr

From: Gaius Nelson <gaius@ntp.cc>
Sent: Tuesday, February 18, 2025 10:49 AM
To: #CI-StPaul_Ward2 <Ward2@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Subject: Ryan Companies US, Inc. - Appeal of Variance Request Denials at Ford Parkway & Cretin

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Dear Council President Noecker,

Hi Rebecca,
I am writing to request that you reject the appeal of variance denials for the following properties:

Ryan Companies US, Inc. (Sean Ryan)

2200 Ford Parkway (Highland Bridge Block 2B)
0 Cretin Avenue South (Highland Bridge Block 2C)

Allowing the development as proposed will:

1. Devalue the thousands of staff and volunteer hours invested in developing a thoughtful and forward-looking master plan and zoning ordinance for the Highland Bridge area;
2. Eliminate the potential for adding over 100 housing units within an area specifically planned for higher density expansion of our city's residential building stock;
3. Freeze out these properties from achieving their highest and best use for decades to come;
4. Underutilized Saint Paul's vast investment in hazardous waste remediation, utilities, and infrastructure construction that the city has provided in this area;
5. Perpetuate and encourage backward thinking land use and development within valuable and premium investment areas.

There are plenty of opportunities within the immediate Highland Village commercial area to refurbish and rejuvenate existing and vacant one-story retail/commercial properties that are currently zoned to accommodate the proposed uses. Existing underutilized parking lots can be redeveloped into similar uses.

City Planning and Urban Design are long-term propositions that take into account the greater good of the community. There is no reason to devalue future development for immediate financial or economic gain.

The Saint Paul Zoning Committee and Planning Commissions deliberated and acted based upon sound legal and planning principles. Please do not override their decision based upon financial arguments of the developer. None the developer's other arguments are insurmountable from a technical perspective, as evidenced by prior construction on sloped sites and similar subsurface conditions on adjacent parcels. And new construction is not subject to rent stabilization. This is strictly an issue of short-term financial gain.

Please oppose the appeal of Ryan Companies US, Inc.

Respectfully submitted,

--

Gaius G. Nelson, RA, EDAC
Former Saint Paul Planning Commission Member & Chair of the Zoning Committee
206 Wheeler Street South
Saint Paul, MN 55105
H: 651-690-0199