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DATE: August 5, 2014

TO: Common Council Members

FROM: Ald. Lauren Cnare, District 3 and CDBG Committee Member

SUBJECT: **Common Council Agenda #27 - Legislative File No. 34536: Acquisition of 1233 McKenna Boulevard (formerly Griff's Restaurant)**

The members of the CDBG directed me to craft a memo on the Committee's "nay" vote (not unanimous) to assist alders with a deeper understanding of that vote. We hope this is helpful to you as you cast your vote tonight.

CDBG Expresses Unanimous Support for Neighborhood Centers

First, it is important to affirm the Committee's deep and long-standing support for neighborhood or community centers and their positive effect on neighborhood resuscitation, stability and success.

CDBG Has Growing Concerns Over Ability to Support All Centers

Second, as the Committee which deals closely with the ongoing financial needs and support of neighborhoods centers, we are deeply concerned about the City's commitment to continue to invest in the on-going and new needs in neighborhoods without a firm plan for sustainability and growth, including a fiscal plan that keeps pace with program and facility needs for new and existing centers. We are concerned over cannibalizing centers even as we strive to support more neighborhoods. As neighborhood center support has been stagnant over the last decade, the need in neighborhoods for vital geographic-based programs and services has only increased.

Need vs. Opportunity and a Plan

The Committee agrees that there is a need in the identified neighborhood. While money to buy, and perhaps even fully rehab this facility, are not solely the Committee's purview, the Committee has a policy responsibility to understand the source of resources to meet the needs of a new center AND has a significant concern over the future funding demands for operations and programming from our Committee given the stagnant or potentially decreasing funding for existing centers. We cannot establish a new center at the detriment of existing centers.

The Committee learned that this has been a "slow burning" opportunity but it came as somewhat of a surprise, especially absent any clear planning documents that indicate this area is highest on a priority list for establishing a neighborhood center. Confounding the priority question is the proximity of the Wisconsin Youth Company. While we understand their mission is directed at a younger audience and lack of funding for additional staffing or programming exists, we think a further exploration of expansion would be informative. The committee's vote against this proposal demonstrates its position that it

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would not be a prudent financial investment at this time to purchase this property with so many crucial questions unanswered and with major concerns raised over costs, operations, programs, and plans.

The Committee further expressed concern over the lack of neighborhood engagement or visible support for either a center or programs. In the recent past, the Committee has supported “unplanned” centers in part based on neighbors organizing and advocating. That has been absent to date for this project.

Please recognize our unanimous support for funding neighborhood centers, including the strategic consideration of new centers, based on sound policy, plans and fiscal management and the ongoing commitment of the Common Council and Mayor’s Office in cooperation with the Community Development Division.

We appreciate your understanding of the relevant issues the Committee wrestled with in this decision.