

**From:** [David Drapac](#)  
**To:** [All Alders](#)  
**Subject:** Public Comments comment on Agenda Item 60 - 212 Merry Street Development (Red Pine) by Dave Drapac  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 29, 2024 6:29:05 PM  
**Attachments:** [Written comments Dave Drapac - Item 60 - 212 Merry Street Development \(Red Pine\).docx](#)

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Dear Alders,

Please find my attached letter with public comments (with exact text copied below ) for the meeting tonight, Oct 29. I am on my way to tonight's meeting to speak further in person and be available for questions.

Forward,

Dave Drapac  
208 Merry Street  
Madison, WI 53704

Dear Alders,

I am writing to share my deep concerns and disapproval for one of the real-estate developments that is included in agenda item 60.

I have been proud to be a next-door neighbor of Red Pine (aka 212 Merry Street) for the past decade. It is a magic and special place, with unique artwork and wild gardens, precious urban biodiversity and cooperatively managed, affordable housing. It is a legacy and environment that I feel is worth preserving.

I am here to ask that the council does not approve the proposed development at 212 Merry Street for funding because it is inadvertently undoing, not preserving what is so special about

Red Pine.

Number one – loss of green space

The development proposes to build a permanent parking structure in the middle of the property. This structure will permanently restrict the use of this urban oasis for future greenspace.

Number two - end to cooperation

The development is predicated on taking away my rights to freely use my property. I have received threats by a lawyer representing the owner and developer that they will start court proceedings if I don't sign a document giving away rights for them to use my private drive indefinitely to access this newly proposed parking structure. The private drive was built for two landlocked neighbors who live behind me because they have no other way to access their homes. Over the years I have been happy to permit Red Pine visitors use of my drive and park in my back yard but I am not willing to sign away my rights to an easement that would permanently restrict future use of my property, including the possibility of relocating the private drive to the other side of my property for better water management and land restoration.

I want to make it very clear tonight, that I do not consent to giving this development indefinite and irrevocable access to my rights to use my own property.

Number three – long-lasting threat to community

The third reason why I am asking the council to not approve this proposition is because the process has and is continuing to create a deep and potentially irreversible rift in the community fabric that the owner of Red Pine has worked so hard for the last 40 years to steward.

The development plans have proceeded without community involvement, which I know others have already made clear.

And instead of community discussion and engagement, I have been receiving threats of lawsuit if I do not give up access to my property.

It feels like a pressure cooker situation here, and should this proposal be formally approved, while remaining fully dependent on a festering easement access issue, it will create conditions for much deeper and long-lasting disagreement rather than creating breathing room for a potentially agreeable solution.

Red Pine has a colourful and valuable history, and it is appreciated for the unique culture it brings to our neighborhood. There are many ways to rejuvenate this affordable income housing that we would all be supportive of.

Thank you for your time and sincere consideration,

Dave Drapac

208 Merry Street

Madison, WI 53704

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208 Merry Street  
Madison, WI 53704

**From:** [Paul Schechter](#)  
**To:** [All Alders](#); [Mayor](#)  
**Cc:** [Frater, Matt](#); ["Abby Davidson"](#); ["christopher burant"](#); [Elliott Gilfillan](#); [Red Pine Cooperative](#)  
**Subject:** Support for Red Pine Cooperative - Item #60  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 29, 2024 5:52:56 PM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[Red Pine Public Comment.pdf](#)

Some people who received this message don't often get email from paul@sunnysidedevelopment.org. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Dear Alders,

Please find my public comment regarding my support for Red Pine Cooperative (agenda item #60) attached. I will also be in attendance at the Common Council meeting this evening and would be happy to answer any/all questions you may have.

Thank you,

-Paul Schechter



**PAUL SCHECHTER** | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
SUNNY SIDE DEVELOPMENT  
608-239-8500 (m) | [sunnysidedevelopment.org](http://sunnysidedevelopment.org)

*Affordable, sustainable housing*

October 29, 2024

Dear Alders,

Once a blue-collar bastion for low-income families, the near east side of Madison is now one of the fastest gentrifying communities in our City. With numerous amenities and fun/eclectic culture, the area has been a magnet for young professionals in recent decades, driving housing costs through the roof. Ironically, the local baristas, tattoo artists, and bike mechanics who create this attractive environment, are being forced to leave because they can no longer afford to live in the same neighborhood where they work. Red Pine Cooperative, which has been in existence nearly 50 years, is one of the few places that remains affordable to service industry workers and its existence is now being threatened.

The property that houses Red Pine Cooperative is owned by Chris Burant—an artist and former member of the co-op in the 1980s, when it was owned/run by Commonwealth Development. Chris and another member purchased it in 1993 because Commonwealth needed to sell and Chris wanted the co-op to survive. Chris is now in his mid-70's with unstable health. He was recently hospitalized for two weeks. Because housing prices have increased so dramatically in recent years, the members of Red Pine Cooperative approached Sunny Side Development last year and asked for help in raising the funds to purchase the property from Chris—which he is offering at a steep discount—to preserve the cooperative indefinitely. Our application was recommended by both City Staff and the CDBG Committee. In addition to purchasing the property, the funding would also address several health and safety concerns such as outdated electrical wiring and a crumbling fire escape. It would not increase the physical footprint of the building. Red Pine simply wants to continue its existence, nothing more.

Two years ago, a wealthy attorney purchased the riverfront property right next to Red Pine Cooperative. The relationship between the new neighbor and the long-established cooperative has not been great, as is sometimes the case between neighbors. The primary cause for contention was the use, or overuse, of the wood-fired sauna in Red Pine's back yard. This sauna was originally built in the 1990's and is completely legal and up-to-code. It has been inspected by City of Madison Building Inspection and passed. The sauna is popular with many people in the neighborhood—not just the members of Red Pine. At one point it was being used 7 days per week as an informal community asset. Admittedly this created a lot of smoke pollution, which was aggravating to the neighbors. To their credit, the members of Red Pine heeded the neighbors' concerns and took many steps to address the situation. They voluntarily reduced sauna usage from seven to one day per week, installed a taller chimney, and installed air quality monitors. They paid for all of these improvements themselves, in an effort to be neighborly, not because they were required to by law. All of this happened prior to our request for funding from the City of Madison.

There have been a few negative public comments regarding the sauna and the easement on Ramsey Court. We are confused by these comments because we thought the sauna issue had been resolved and Ramsey Court has been used by the residents of Red Pine for decades without complaints. It is curious that such issues are being raised now, just as we are asking for City assistance. Regarding public notice of our intentions to rehab the property, thousands of buildings permits are pulled per year without such public notices as they are typically only required for new construction or if changing the exterior property footprint; not for inside repairs. Our scope does not increase the footprint of the building nor

impact the neighbors. However, after reading the first public comment, we reached out to the neighbors multiple times—via phone call, text and email and asked them if they would be willing to sit down with us to discuss their issues. They have never responded. Instead, they write directly to City officials with their complaints. If the neighbors truly wanted to solve these issues, why not accept the multiple invitations we have offered to discuss them? Red Pine Co-op is a near east side institution that has a proven track-record of coming to the table and making real compromises—as it did with the sauna. It is more than willing do so again and collaboratively work on any issues the neighbors would like to discuss. If one day per week of sauna usage is still too much, we would consider decommissioning it altogether or switching to electric heat. If Red Pine’s current contributions to Ramsey Ct. upkeep are not enough, members would gladly increase their shoveling and/or payments for the neighbor to do so in a memorialized signed contract. Such contributions have been made for decades and were never considered insufficient previously.

We urge the Common Council to reject these fictitious reasons for not funding this important project and displacing the Red Pine residents from their rightful home.

Thank you for your consideration,

Paul Schechter



**PAUL SCHECHTER** | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUNNY SIDE DEVELOPMENT

608-239-8500 (m) | [sunnysidedevelopment.org](http://sunnysidedevelopment.org)

*Affordable, sustainable housing*

**From:** [annewalker@homelandgarden.com](mailto:annewalker@homelandgarden.com)  
**To:** [All Alders](#)  
**Subject:** Item 60, Red Pine Cooperative on Merry and Ramsey Ct  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 29, 2024 5:35:32 PM  
**Attachments:** [WPM\\$DIMW.PM\\$](#)

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Alders

I apologize for sending this twice. I did not have the correct item number. I was also just contacted by Sunny Side re the sauna usage, informing me I was not correct. I based my comment on the information that was submitted by Red Pine to the city, and forwarded to me by Alder Rummel.

Best, Anne Walker

*Subject:* Item 4, Red Pine Cooperative on Merry and Ramsey Ct  
*Date sent:* Tue, 29 Oct 2024 10:02:58 -0500

Dear Alders,

I am a long-time neighbor of Red Pine on Merry Street. I consider Christopher Burant, who owns Red Pine, to be a friend. I appreciate that, for decades, Red Pine has provided affordable housing in our neighborhood, in a cooperative fashion. In the past, under Christopher's management, household issue's that arose have been handled by holding a household meeting, with immediate neighbors would have been invited. Food would have shared, and neighbors would have respectfully discussed the issue.

I understand that Christopher is getting older, and needs to change gears. However, the "new" version of Red Pine feels very different to me. Neighbors were not made aware of Red Pine and Sunny Side Development's proposal. This is a departure from the Red Pine norm, and, I believe, lacks common sense, or a commitment to working cooperatively with neighbors. There were some basic issues that should have beer ironed out, before the proposal got to this stage.

A City of Madison Common Council approved documents comes to mind for me.. The document is "A Best Practices Guide for Developers, Neighborhoods and Policymakers" and was developed by the City of Madison Department of Planning and Development. The document, ***Participating in the Development Process*** states, on pg 12,

"Neighborhoods bring a local and historical context to a project, as well as an understanding of issues related to a specific site. Neighborhood involvement may improve a proposed project, especially if residents are able to articulate a coherent



vision for the physical development of the neighborhood. Early neighborhood involvement in a project may also help reduce problems late in the review process."

Had early neighborhood discussion taken place, there would be a reduction in "problems late in the review process". Neighbors need the ability to meaningfully weigh in, because there are issues related to the site that need to be discussed. Common Council is not the right place to work this out.

One issue of concern that has been raised is the easement and use of a private lane, Ramsey Ct. Ramsey Ct sounds pretty grand. In fact, it is a narrow, one lane, mostly unimproved alley. Efficient use of the space depends on neighbors cooperating with each. A good place to start would be talking to each other about the legal issues here, and that should have happened much sooner in the process.

One of the challenges additionally for neighbors in recent years has been the commercial composting operation at Red Pine and, essentially, the commercialization of the wood-fired sauna. In the recent past, the sauna had approximately 200 users, as estimated by Red Pine, and was in use, daily, fall through spring, often 10+ hours a day. It is a wood fired sauna, and the smoke stack is lower than surrounding homes. Neighbors were regularly breathing wood smoke. Also of concern, the sauna has partially burned down once, and twice, the stove was burning at such a high heat, that it broke the stove (welds). The sauna is a wooden structure, surrounded by stacks of dry wood. It is situated in a neighborhood full of wooden homes that are stacked right on top of each other. Concern regarding the wood fired sauna is, I believe, very reasonable. Neighbors had been working to navigate the issue with Christopher and the household.

Red Pine, in their response to the city regarding neighbors concerns and the sauna shared a neighborhood 'agreement' that is not accurate, or, amenable to immediate neighbors. Red Pine is once again proposing operating the sauna 7-days a week, and has additionally proposed summer hours.

Additionally, in their response to the city regarding neighbors concerns, Red Pine included a portion on affirmative marketing, and stated, "Recently, an African American member of Red Pine...moved out. This was not because of any issue with the cooperative-which he loved, but rather due to the litigious nature of the neighbors....(which)made him feel very uncomfortable."

I spoke with the neighbor. He was **very** upset that Mr Wenta, from Dane County, was on the property to discuss the sauna with neighbors, at a scheduled meeting, that he was unaware of. Christopher Burant and another member of the household, Elliot, were aware of the meeting, but it would seem, did not share that information with the entire household. While I feel terrible that a neighbor felt so unsafe due to Mr Wenta's visit that he moved from a home he loved, I do feel, strongly, that Red Pine bears some responsibility for not informing their household of the scheduled meeting .

In my experience, the "new" version of Red Pine seems to have a chronic issue with timely, effective and respectful communication. The accessory uses, the sauna and composting, cause parking issues in an area with a 1/2 block long, dead-end street with limited parking. The sauna causes nearby homes to often be polluted with unhealthy wood smoke. While I support the continuation of affordable and cooperative housing on Merry St, I cannot support the application at this time.

Respectfully, Anne Walker

(no attachments)

Attachments: C:\Users\Anne\AppData\Local\Temp\WPM\$TAPJ.PM\$  
C:\Users\Anne\AppData\Local\Temp\WPM\$57XH.PM\$

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