



Office of the Common Council

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Date: 9/28/12
To: Plan Commission
From: Alder Sue Ellingson
Re: Gallina Companies proposed redevelopment at 502 S Park St (Ideal Body)

On Monday, Oct 1, the Plan Commission will hear the request of Gallina Companies to redevelop the Ideal Body site, 502 S Park St. I support this redevelopment proposal. A number of neighbors are opposed to the project. They believe buildings should be limited to 4 stories because 5 stories is inappropriate to the setting and because existing neighborhood plans call for a limit of 4 stories.

I support the project

My vision for Park St is to build a place that people come to, not just drive through. The surest way to achieve the vision of a walkable, vibrant neighborhood is by increasing density. More people living in the area will make successful shops and restaurants possible. People who live close-in are going to bike, bus, and walk more, and drive much less. We have seen this transformation on Monroe St. It can happen on Park St as well.

The neighborhood and the city will benefit from this project. We get new buildings instead of rundown storefronts. We get successful retail. We get increased taxes. Our choice for Ideal may be to accept the current proposal, or to have a shuttered and rundown body shop. We already have too many empty, rundown buildings on Park St.

I respect and like the group of neighbors who oppose this project, and I very much regret this disagreement.

Zoning Code Sec. 28.07(6)(f)1. a.

Opponents say that 1.a. will not be met because this building, 5 stories, 62', is too tall for the neighborhood. While I agree that 5 stories is too tall for Drake St, I strongly disagree that it's too tall for Park St.

Many tall buildings are close by on Park St:

- Meriter south building – 7 stories.
- Meriter main building – 11 stories.
- Parkside Apartments – 8 stories.
- Brittingham Apartments – 10 stories.
- St Mary's/Dean – 4 stories but 70'. Plus their 2004 PUD allows them to add 2 stories.
- Wingra Clinic – 4 stories, but 60'.

In addition, Park St is 88' from curb to curb and 65,000 cars a day drive by on Park at Drake. That's a very big street and a huge amount of traffic, more than University Ave or Campus Dr or John Nolen. The physical nature of the site easily supports a 5 story, 62' building.

Zoning Code Sec. 28.07(6)(f)1. b.

Opponents say that 1.b. will not be met because existing neighborhood plans call for a limit of 4 stories.

I have looked into the question of neighborhood plans. As you well know, the city takes neighborhood plans very seriously and always consults them when considering a proposed development. Unfortunately in this case, there are plans with conflicting recommendations.

The *Greenbush Neighborhood Plan* was adopted in 2008 (also amended with a housing revitalization plan in 2010). This plan is mostly about other areas of Greenbush, but mentions Park St briefly. Page 32 says, "The corridors should include mixed-use developments with buildings between two- and four-stories in height." Page 36 includes "Park Street Design Guidelines," but there are no guidelines for height.

The *Urban Design Guidelines for Private Property Improvements and Streetscape Design* was adopted in 2004. This plan was done specifically to address urban design along Park St and to create an urban design district. The results of this study were written into ordinance, MGO 33.24(14). For any proposed development on South Park St, the Urban Design Commission has a copy of the ordinance at hand to see how the project measures up.

MGO 33.24(14)(d)3 addresses building height. Buildings are *required* to be at least 2 stories in height. There are additional *guidelines* which are recommended to be met, but not required. Guideline 33.24(14)(d)3.b. says, "New buildings should generally be limited to four stories in height. However, building height bonuses of up to two additional floors may be allowed depending on the quality of the design, the affect of the development on the adjoining neighborhood, and the contribution of the project to: the use mix and activity in the vicinity, and the character of the street. The bonus stories serve as an incentive for creative building design and should not be viewed as the permitted height."

The guideline is not well written. The standards for when bonuses are given and when not should have been much more specific. However, it's what we have. City staff has told me that there are other urban design districts with similar bonuses, that developers commonly ask for the bonus stories, and the bonus stories are usually awarded.

In my opinion, the case is strongest that up to 6 stories are allowed if the Urban Design Commission so chooses. For this project, UDC has given final approval to the 5 story proposal.

Neighborhood feedback

I've received comments from neighbors, both by email and in-person at neighborhood meetings. I have summarized feedback, below, by individuals and by households.

I've gotten comments from 63 people/52 households, who expressed clear opinions. Some of the comments were by email and some in-person at neighborhood meetings.

Of those who had clear opinions:

Individuals:

- 31 favor, 49%
- 32 oppose, 51%

Households:

- 28 favor, 54%
- 24 oppose, 46%

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Some opinions were less clear, but leaned one way:

- 5 individuals/4 households generally oppose
- 1 individual/1 household generally favor

Including all responses, both clear and less clear:

Individuals:

- 32 favor or generally favor, 46%
- 37 oppose or generally oppose, 54%

Households:

- 29 favor or generally favor 51%
- 28 oppose or generally oppose, 49%

Comments from 69 individuals is much more than I hear on most topics. However, to put it in perspective, there were 3,435 voters in April 2011 when I was elected, and there are about 11,600 residents in the district.

I hope that you will approve this project.