



May 20, 2020

**RE: St Philip Neri and Expanding Opportunities for Affordable Housing**

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

The Hosford Abernethy Neighborhood District (HAND) Board met last night to discuss the proposal to change the zoning of the St Philip Neri campus to RM2 as part of the Expanding Opportunities for Affordable Housing (EOAH) project you are considering. For over 20 years, HAND has consistently advocated for policies that would maintain and increase economic diversity in our neighborhood. We recognize there is a lack of affordable housing in HAND, especially that suitable for families, and we believe this shortage hurts our community.

After much discussion, we voted to endorse the zoning change at St Philip Neri (we did not take a position on the larger EOAH effort). We were deeply troubled by the EOAH's lack of legal guarantee that, once the zoning change is complete, constructed housing will actually be affordable. Therefore, our support is conditioned on adding a restriction limiting future development on the site to affordable housing, with a properly balanced mix of family-oriented units, operated by a non-profit, and that future development be sensitive to the historic context of the property, which occupies a prominent position in the Ladd's Addition Historic District. And while no one expressed any objections to using portions of the site for administrative or religious uses, we are concerned that the RM2 would allow uses incompatible with the setting, such as a community clinic that could lead to a situation similar to that at St Francis.

We heard from a number of nearby residents, many of whom had concerns about the project. The streets in Ladd's Addition adjacent to the site are quite narrow, and there is a potential for a sizable increase in traffic and parking difficulty that 57 new residential units would bring. Parents with children in the nearby Abernethy Elementary School, already overcrowded, expressed doubts about how the school could accommodate a sudden influx of new students, and the physical size of the project would change the character of that part of the neighborhood significantly.

Some of these issues can be addressed through design: massing new buildings along Division Street as (opposed to the interior of the site), having vehicles enter and exit the site either directly from Division or from SE 16th (as they do today), rather than Hickory and Tamarack Streets, would help somewhat (even better would be policies discouraging residents from owning cars in the first place).

More fundamentally, a smaller scale project would address all of these concerns at once, and providing community benefits such as incorporating green space and trees would help counteract the costs of the project to nearby residents.

These sorts of details can make or break a project like the one envisioned at St Philip Neri. Handling multiple sites around the city in a blanket manner makes it difficult to deal with the exceptional circumstances each site presents. What is needed for a successful project at St Philip Neri may not work elsewhere. It might be better, therefore, for city planners to work out a site-specific plan for each location, which can then be individually approved under a governing rubric.

Despite differing opinions about a number of issues, there were a few things nearly everyone who attended the meeting agreed with: the need for affordable family housing is great, and that, if you decide to move forward with the zoning change (at St Philip Neri in particular and other sites in general), it is critical that you build in legal guarantees that affordable family housing be delivered.

Thank you,

Chris Eykamp  
HAND Chair

Cc Travis Phillips, Catholic Charities  
Julia Metz, Catholic Charities  
Fr. Rick Paperini, St Philip Neri