

East Calhoun Community Organization



May 10, 2019

Minneapolis City Council President Lisa Bender
350 South 5th Street, Room 307
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Peter Crandall, Senior City Planner, City of Minneapolis
Department of Community Planning & Economic Development, Planning Division
250 South 4th Street, Room 300
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Re: 3017, 3021, and 3025 E Calhoun Parkway

Dear Council President Bender and Mr. Crandall:

The ECCO Board has been closely involved with the development of this site for over two years. Working with the developer, we have seen it progress from a 5-story apartment building, to a 4-story assisted living facility, to the current 3-story combination of apartments and condominiums. During that time we have worked closely with Basir Tareen, the property owner, and the city planning staff to find a development which is economically viable, an asset to the existing neighborhood environment, and conforms to the zoning and overlay rules for development on the parkway next to Lake Calhoun/Bde Mka Ska. The current proposal is the result of a lot of cooperative, constructive give-and-take between the neighborhood and Basir and his team. The result is a compromise which meets many of our primary objectives regarding density, parking, alley access, and architectural value. But while it is now 3-stories, the building itself (even without the rooftop patios) stands in violation of both the 2.5 story and the 35' restrictions of the Shoreland Overlay as well as the guidance from the Uptown Small Area Plan which is explicitly called out in the 2040 plan as "largely consistent with the 2040 land use guidance". The consequence is the necessary request you have before you for multiple variances due to height for this project.

Other than the implications of this height variance the neighborhood would wholeheartedly support this development. Even with the height variance we find the development to be an asset to our community and a good example of cooperation

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between developer, owner and neighborhood. Basir Tareen and DJR Architecture have been fair and consistent with us in adjusting to find a solution we can both honor and respect. However, the height variance of 49' due to the rooftop structures remains as a concern to us. The building hosts three rooftop patios set back from the building front. These are accessed by private stairs from each of the third floor condos. The stair landings add another 10 feet to the total height. Given that they are not visible from the street, and represent a small footprint, we believe that they fall within the spirit of the Shoreland Overlay. However coupled with the 39' 8" height of this 3-story building due to its 13'3" ceilings for each floor (the 3-story building to the south is 25' or 8'3" per floor by comparison), it runs the risk of setting a precedent of a nearly 50' building on the parkway. Our concern derives from the history of developers using previous developments in the area as references for justifying violations of height and/or density zoning guidelines. So our question (supported by the development team) is how can we support this building while insuring that it does not set a precedent which could be unfortunately and inaccurately invoked as a starting point for some future development discussion on the parkway?

It is not our intent to oppose this development as it stands. Given all of the excellent cooperation and the process we have traveled with this development team and city planning staff we would prefer to support it, but only if you can help us figure out how to avoid setting a potentially dangerous precedent for managing developments overlooking one of the jewels of our urban lakes environment. This is a resource enjoyed by all the citizens of Minneapolis and the entire metro region and deserves enforcement of every legal protection. One possible solution, while not legally binding, would be a statement in your ruling to the effect that any precedent for comparison taken from this building should be based on the base building height and not include structures like rooftop patios. Given the growing popularity of rooftop patios in general, it might be wise to establish a planning policy as to how they should be considered. Either of these approaches would serve to address our concerns for height comparisons. However until the concern is addressed the position of the ECCO Board is no position. Neither support nor opposition to this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judy Shields". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Judy Shields, President, East Calhoun Community Organization (ECCO)