

March 9, 2022

City of Detroit  
Historic District Commission  
Planning and Development Department  
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center 2 Woodward Avenue - Suite 808  
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Historic District Chairperson Tiffany Franklin, Commissioners James Hamilton, Richard Hosey, Brandon Lockhart and Dennis Miriani and Historic District Staff,

Last week, many West Village residents learned about a **huge 58-unit development** that will require **demolishing two historic homes** in our protected Historic District, from signs that suddenly appeared.

The signs, which announced three "community engagement" meetings, were only posted on Wednesday, February 23, **just one day** before the final meeting date, which means that **two meetings had already passed** before residents were informed of the opportunity to share their concerns.

Many neighbors voiced strong concerns about the development, which intends to **tear down historic properties** so it can take over almost an **entire city block**, on Van Dyke Avenue from Coe to St. Paul Streets. However, these legitimate concerns were dismissed and ignored by the developer.

#### **West Villagers want a say in the future of our district:**

In listening to dozens of residents, members of the newly formed Historic Parker Street Block Club found that the vast majority strongly opposed the development as planned, and the few who supported it did so only with several caveats.

Among all residents, there was a **strong consensus** that included the following points:

- West Village residents—old and new, and renters and owners alike—largely agree that we are **not opposed to development** that will help advance the well-being of our community and neighborhood.
- However, we **are opposed to this development** as currently planned, because it is **too large** in terms of number of units.
- Significantly, residents' various concerns about the proposed development's **negative impact could be ameliorated by reducing the number of units** by half.
- Additionally, a smaller development would **still provide community benefits** cited by the developer, like construction jobs, activation of a partially vacant site, expansion of the city tax base, **without incurring community deficits** identified by residents, including:

- **Permanently destroying** of historic structures,
- **Disrupting the historic character** of the neighborhood,
- **Overwhelming available parking**, not only in the immediate West Village neighborhood, but also in Indian Village, Islandview, and the Van Dyke/Kercheval and Van Dyke/Agnes business corridors,
- **Insufficient drive/access ways** to accommodate number of units proposed, affecting businesses and residents,
- **Increasing traffic** beyond the capacity of the roadways,
- **Safety risks** for pedestrians,
- Reducing permeable surfaces, significantly **increasing flood risk**,
- Overtaxing aging **street drains and sewer lines**, and
- **Displacing** residents.
- There are additional strong concerns about the the building's **design, height and scale dominating** existing historic homes.
- Neighbors have pointed to examples of both old and new properties, like the many townhouse blocks, which **still increase density while respecting the historic district's style and character**.
- Residents are further upset that the developer is able to use a loophole to **sidestep existing historic district rules**, including demolishing two historic homes, while current homeowners are having **difficulty getting approval** to improve their homes.
- Further, homeowners are having **difficulty with essential infrastructure maintenance**, such as addressing the **flooding storm drains and sewer line backups**, while the developer is able to accomplish this costly and resource-heavy project.
- Finally, the “engagement efforts” led by the developers have been **rife with late and misleading information**, and concerns and suggestions raised by residents have been dismissed.
- As indicated by comments residents have shared, other major concerns include the following:
  - **Affordability** for low- and middle-income Detroiters,
  - **Lifespan** of the development,
  - **Quality** of construction materials,
  - Negative affect on **property values** of neighboring homeowners, and

- Disruption of daily life due to the estimated **two years of construction**.

**Here are reactions and comments shared, verbatim, by West Village residents:**

- *“I don’t think the historic society should be allowing this big of a project. It really will have a huge impact on the “historic neighborhood”. It’s one of the incentives moving to a historic district not to have stuff like this”* - West Village homeowner of 3 years
- *“I hate it. It’s clearly not what west village looks like.”* - Owner of multiple properties and current West Village resident of 30+ years
- *“I don’t fully disagree with the development but do think it should be a lot smaller and have a lot more attention put to match the historic aesthetic of the neighborhood.”* - West Village resident and recent homeowner
- *“They need to figure out the parking situation. It impacts all the neighborhoods What’s being developed here.”* - West Village resident of 3 years

**Therefore, the Historic Parker Street Block Club, on behalf of all the residents of West Village, request the following:**

- The City of Detroit’s Planning and Development Department and the Historic District Commission should:
  - Ensure the development delivers *net* community benefits by only approving a revised proposal that effectively addresses deficits identified by residents.
  - Ensure protection of West Village’s historic character by only approving a revised proposal that allows for the retention of historic properties.
  - Protect the style and character of the historic district by only approving a revised proposal that complements the existing historic properties in size, scale and aesthetics.
- The Detroit Land Bank Authority should:
  - Ensure protection of West Village’s historic character by only entering into purchase agreements that prohibits demolition of buildings in protected in Historic Districts.
- The developer should enter into a Community Benefits Agreement with West Village residents that:
  - Delivers *net* community benefits by effectively addressing community deficits identified by residents.
  - Commits to a reduction in the number of units installed by half.

- Ensures the building respects the historic neighborhood in terms of appearance, size, scale and building quality.
- Retracts requests to demolish historic properties.
- Ensures the residents of the building have adequate parking without impacting current resident parking or relying on the creation of additional surface lots.
- Provides dedicated driveways and/or access methods that do not overwhelm current residential and commercial access to alleyways and property access points.
- Mitigates safety risks and disruptions caused by increased traffic.
- Mitigates effects of the development and the influx of residents to aging infrastructure, including overtaxed street drainage and fragile sewer lines.
- Requires a clear commitment to implementing solutions in response to the concerns and requests of the neighborhood.
- Requires timely and transparent information about building plans be widely disseminated to residents.
- Provides redress to residents for negative impact to property values and disruptions caused by the estimated 24 months of construction.

Sincerely,

Alex Wilson, Nick Wilson, Aleen Hudson, Bob Lundgoot and Amber Cecil, founding members of the Historic Parker Street Block Club