

Think Before You Click: This email originated outside our organization.

Re: Zoning File Number 20-046-445

To All Members of the Zoning Committee of the Saint Paul Planning Commission:

We live at 1598 Edmund Avenue, kitty-korner in the alley from the existing Kimball Court building at 545 North Snelling and directly across from the site of the proposed expansion at 555 North Snelling. We have lived here for 30 years, from our 20s and now into our 50s, and still sometimes find ourselves referring to Kimball Court as “Wilder.” We have always been proud to live near low-income housing and be courteous and neighborly to the tenants who park in front of our house and pass us in the alley. A few we have really enjoyed getting to know over the years and hope they feel likewise.

So it’s strange to find ourselves quite wary about this expansion plan. We can only be cheerleaders for it with more consideration of some serious issues that we feel have, so far, been overlooked. We all know that housing is a top priority for our city, and it’s tempting to be pollyanna-ish and gung-ho over any and every new proposal. Those that do not live as close as we do to the site of such proposals have the luxury/privilege of endorsing them unconditionally, whereas we would be stupid not to ask difficult questions.

If this application is approved, we would want and request:

**** 24-hour staffing as a permit condition, not a promise by Beacon or its management company.***

**** Some consideration of parking (perhaps use of some spots at Dey Appliance across the street at Charles and Snelling, because many current tenants do have cars and more will have cars if the addition is built.***

**** Daily trash pickup on all sides of the property.***

**** No alley access to the building or proposed garden for tenants.***

There are many, many questions about the existing and future facility; the zoning staff report on the application; the attached 2016 Congregate Living Zoning Study; and the appropriateness of this location for a concentrated grouping of “the hardest to house” with all their challenges and vulnerabilities.

It seems the category of “supportive housing” only came into being four years ago, in 2016, as a land use. The Congregate Living Zoning Study created it as sort of a catch-all category, but it is not a social service category. As the Study notes, most types of congregate living facilities are licensed by the State of Minnesota or Ramsey County. *Supportive Housing, however, is a category that is not licensed at all.* While the description of it says supports are “provided,” those supports are completely voluntary. No resident is required to receive or participate in services. This is important, because the Study suggests that the State or County will “regulate” Supportive Housing facilities, and that is simply not the case. Therefore, the City must do so, and zoning was recognized as one way to do that, hence the Study and Report. Conditions on permits are another critical way. In our experience with neighboring Taco Bell, relying on DSI and police to resolve predictable problems is a burden on neighbors who have to report each and every instance and is not a solution.

Meanwhile, the Study does admit that Supportive Housing facilities do “have external impacts related to their size” (p. 2).

Given that Supportive Housing is not licensed, we are not quite yet comfortable with the job that Beacon Interfaith has done with respect to those external impacts. (It’s confusing and unsettling, too, that Beacon Interfaith owns it, but a separate management company operates it, and yet another subcontractor company provides the nonmandatory services.) In the present building, the type of person admitted has changed, per Beacon staff. They are moving more to providing apartments and rooms with shared baths/kitchens to “the hardest to house,” which means more people all together under one roof with all the normal social pressures (can you imagine living in a building with 75 strangers, not to mention that many are trying to overcome major problems?) AND the extra challenges of learning how to live with others in community for maybe the first time. This is a big change from admitting mostly people just down on their luck financially. We’d ideally like to see how it plays out for another couple of years before an expansion is attempted. As is, there is a lot of garbage in the alley, and shopping carts; there are tenants whose friends and visitors “call” them by shouting up from the alley at back windows (some in the City have seen photos of this); there are tenants who hang out on the front retaining walls of residential property owners on Charles and Edmund Avenues; there are tenants and their guests attempting car maintenance in the alley.... the design for the new addition partially addresses a few of these issues. More common space, especially inside the building, would be a good thing.

But it’s genuinely disturbing that Supportive Housing is NOT licensed or regulated. One of us (Kristine) has worked in residential treatment centers for people with mental illness. Those treatment centers are required to have two overnight staff, and that is for a resident population of 15. That’s right, two staff for 15 residents. Yet Kimball Court, with 76 and and soon perhaps 98 people, has no such requirement, with a population including many who might have just graduated from such a treatment program or will go to one if not successful at Kimball Court! That makes no sense.

The Congregate Living Zoning Study discusses the goal of avoiding “clusters” of facilities. This addition seems to create a large “cluster” in one location! Clusters are to be avoided, goes the logic, in part because they do not help tenants re-enter society. They feel too institutional. It’s indeed hard to see how living in an apartment building with 97 others sharing many of the same challenges you do would not feel institutional.

The zoning code considers tenant vulnerabilities in including site “details” down to the allowed proximity of adult bookstores. Well, here there is no adult bookstore, but there is an adult sex store called The Love Doctor possibly within 500 feet of Kimball Court. And this area is rife with drug dealers, especially when Taco Bell is open. In the past week, even with that “cover” still closed after the post-George Floyd civil unrest and pending approval of a CUP for a rebuild, we have watched three drug deals take place on our street just in front of 1595 Edmund Avenue. It’s not the place for people in recovery.

Then there is the elephant-in-the-room of zoning in Saint Paul: the complete lack of buffer zones between commercial and residential districts such that the zoning staff report submitted by Joshua Williams can narrowly find that the surrounding “district” would not be affected by this addition. Well, we are “surrounding” the expansion site, but we are technically not part of the same “district” as is Kimball Court, as we are zoned R4, while the expansion site is zoned T2. The duplex just opposite the current Kimball Court building (at 1597 Charles) is zoned RM2. Yet all permit approvals are enacted as if

this is not the case, as if all T2 sites are exactly the same. They are not. (And our property taxes are certainly the same as they would be if we lived in the “quiet middle” of the block, even though we do not.) Please take a look at the west elevation below and see how the proposed structure towers over the alley and neighboring R2 and RM2 properties. It seems to us that the fact of 545 and 555 North Snelling being located on a boundary between zoning types should matter a little more than it currently does. Allowing Supportive Housing makes sense. Does creating a sort of Supportive Housing Superblock with close to 100 residents make sense in this location when, if proposed a few addresses down the road, it would be limited to around 17 residents? Maybe so, maybe not.

The design has and had features that would be great if the building existed in isolation. We neighbors immediately balked at the sight of a rooftop terrace facing west with a grand sweeping view of: us and our yards! And to its credit, Beacon just as immediately responded and moved that terrace to the front of the building. It still seems intent on a north-side garden alongside Taco Bell’s parking lot and garbage area, with gates on both Snelling and alley ends, accessible to residents with their keys. If this remains in the plan, we can say with confidence that the garden will soon be a neighborhood drug hub, and there will be “hanging out” spillover in the alley at all hours of the day. It could even be dangerous for tenants hanging out and walking back there, as drivers do use the alley along Snelling as a frontage road. If speed bumps were added, that would make the situation somewhat safer.

The lack of consideration of parking is another instance of failing to treat the location sensitively. Why did the zoning staff report not include the actual number of current tenants of Kimball Court with cars? Why assume they all take transit? ***After all, many homeless people have cars and little else — and have lived in those cars.*** We neighbors can tell you pretty confidently that with 22 more tenants, there could be at least 7 more cars seeking spots on Charles, Edmund, and maybe Sherburne and Fry, and these are all already high-demand streets with numerous apartment buildings and four-plexes. It’s not so small an issue that it should be swept under the rug.

We hope that the Zoning Committee and full Planning Commission will do its best to consider this Kimball Court CUP application in the context of the surrounding R4 and RM2 areas. We also hope that they will consider both this Kimball Court CUP application and the concurrent Border Foods/Taco Bell rebuilding (and new drive-through-layout) application in tandem so that if Taco Bell rebuilds, noise from its operation does not keep Kimball Court tenants up all night, because even if the new building cannot be zoned residential, of course it would be very residential for those living there.

To conclude: with (1) overnight staff and (2) Snelling-side-only (not alley) access for residents to the building and garden, ***as conditions on the permit***, we believe the planned addition could be a real improvement to Kimball Court and its residents — and an asset to the “South Midway.” Without those conditions, given that Supportive Housing is not a licensed/regulated category, and that the population being served by Kimball Court is changing, and that Kimball Court is in a T2 district bordering two residential districts, and that “external impacts [related to] size” are recognized by the City, we do see potential problems.

Sincerely,
Kristine and Mark Vesley
1598 Edmund Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55104

Attachment: Drawing of northwest corner of addition showing alley with duplex on Charles; our property is just out of view to the north (driveway corner is visible).



Hello,

I am John Kachmarek and have been notified of the above permit request. I own a duplex at 1601 Charles Ave. two doors down across the alley behind Kimball Court. That alley has become kind of a 'hang-out' for smoking I presume but, the loitering has caused a safety concern for some of my tenants, especially young women.

I see there is a camera on the rear of the building and would like to know if it is being monitored? Also, what else is being done, like resident conduct rules so, I can assure the safety of my tenants.

Thank you for your attention,

John Kachmarek 651-699-0778

Dear Zoning Committee Members

I have been a resident of St. Paul in the Macalester-Groveland Area since 1979. I drive Snelling Ave frequently. I am continually impressed with the quality community making activities that St. Paulites engage in and I thank you for your work on the zoning committee.

I am writing you to encourage your support for Beacon Interfaith Collaborative's plans for expansion and alterations to the Kimball Court Apartment Home property on Snelling Ave. I have been involved with Beacon for almost 10 years particularly with their building and support of the nearby Prior Crossing facility.

Beacon has a history of building and maintaining quality housing, shelter and supportive services for community members. (often the most vulnerable)

The Snelling/Charles part of Snelling Ave needs revitalization. I think the expansion, upgrades and additional service areas will go a long way toward that.

Residents of Kimball Court have energy to contribute to the neighborhood and our community. Many of them helped in protection and clean ups during the recent racial pandemic uprisings.

Human capital should not be wasted. Your vote on this zoning decision will be a step toward breaking the cycles of homelessness and put energy toward supporting folks' improving their health, meeting life goals.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Linda Fei
1359 Sargent Ave
St. Paul MN 55105

Hello,

I'm writing to share my support as a neighbor in the Hamline midway area, for Beacon's Kimball Court Apartments expansion on Snelling Avenue. I live at 1135 Charles Ave. in the Midway. I have worked for Beacon for 9 years. I moved to Midway in 2015 and appreciate the mixture of affordable and market rate housing. It's very important to me that all people have a home in every community but especially my own. It is also so important that folks have support services they need in so stay in their homes. I hope you will put your full support behind this worthy project.

Sarah Staiger
(Along with Michael Staiger
Senna Staiger
Flora Staiger)

1135 Charles Ave
St Paul, MN 55104

To the Zoning Committee:

I am writing regarding the proposed Kimball Court expansion. I live on Sherburne Avenue, less than 400 feet from Kimball Court. I am generally supportive of housing availability and believe that it is essential, yet I am concerned that some elements of the plan and report do not adequately address the situation "on the ground".

First, I would like to highlight one finding relating to *Zoning Code § 65.162: (a) The facility shall be a minimum distance of one thousand three hundred twenty (1,320) feet from any other of the following congregate living facilities with more than four (4) adult residents, except in B5-B5 business districts where it shall be at least six hundred (600) feet from any other such facility: supportive housing facility, licensed correctional community residential facility, emergency housing facility, shelter for battered persons, or overnight shelter.* While this condition was considered to be "met" because the expanded Kimball Court would be no closer to the existing Hovander House than the currently existing Kimball Court, this fails to account for the spirit of the code: minimizing density of supportive housing in a T2 district. Allowing for an expansion of Kimball Court would increase by 19 the potential number of residents utilizing supportive housing in the within a 1000 ft radius. This concern is also noted relating to *Zoning Code § 65.162(b).*

This is not to say that the expansion should not be approved. Rather, I request that Kimball Court has conditions placed on any modification to the CUP to reflect this concern. In order to do this, I recommend that 24-hour staffing be a condition of approval. After all, this facility is "supportive" in nature, and round-the-clock staffing can only serve to increase the "supportive" nature of the facility while also ensuring a positive neighborhood presence.

Second, according to *Zoning Code § 65.162(d)* parking is not required. However, many current residents of Kimball Court own automobiles and it would be expected that a similar proportion of future residents would as well. This would put an additional burden on available street parking (which also puts additional strain on snow plowing resources). This must be considered before approving an expansion of the facility.

As with my first point, this does not preclude the expansion of the facility. However, parking throughout the neighborhood will lead to residents taking the shortest available path to their cars, which would certainly increase foot traffic out from the building through the alley. In order to avoid this increase, I recommend a condition that any alley egresses be designated as "emergency exit only" with the doors or gates outfitted with integrally alarmed crash bars.

As noted in the *CUP Application Consistency with Sec. 61.501, 61.503 and Sec. 65.162: Sec. 61.501. - Conditional use permit, general standards (b)*, the premise for not having parking is acceptable because transit is easily available on Snelling, so focusing all foot traffic out of the Snelling side of the building should be a non-issue. Concerns about the door alarms going off as a result of non-emergency usage would be alleviated by my earlier requested condition of 24-hour staffing.

I hope that my comments are carefully considered and are reflected in the decision that is made by the Committee.

--Tyler Vidal
1559 Sherburne Ave Apt 3
Saint Paul, MN 55104

I own the duplex located at 1597 Charles Avenue. This property is located directly across the alley to the west of current Kimball Court apartment building and proposed expansion. While I understand the importance of affordable housing and generally support the proposed expansion, as a property directly impacted by this expansion, I have several concerns.

While most Kimball Court residents do not own cars, some do and with the expansion of the facility, it will almost certainly increase traffic and activity in the alley that runs adjacent to my property and the Kimball Court building. The level of activity in this alley is already high and occurs at all hours. As an example, due to the lack of parking for Kimball Court residents, this area has been used by residents to work on cars and as a pick-up area for Kimball Court tenants. My concern is that this type of activity and noise will only increase as the number of residents' increase.

Every effort should be made in the design of the building to minimize activity in the rear of the building. This would include ensuring there is no direct access from the alley to the garden area proposed at the north end of the proposed building expansion.

I would also like to see the staff at Kimball Court take an active role in mitigating this type of activity. Ensuring the building is staffed 24 –hours and developing a plan to routinely monitor activity outside the building including the alley would be very helpful as would providing adjacent property owners with a point of contact for future questions and concerns.

In my view, the proposed expansion necessitates the need for Kimball Court to create a partnership with local property owners. If that occurs, this proposal will be a welcome addition to the neighborhood.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tom Burns

Dear Zoning Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Barbara Swanson, and I am a 30 year resident of St. Paul.

I support Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative and its proposal for expanding Kimball Court at Snelling Avenue.

The homes Beacon builds are quality homes with care that also extends to its tenants. St. Paul has the opportunity to stem the growing tide of homelessness by supporting Beacon's work including Kimball Court's expansion.

Thank you for your attention to the critical need of permanent supportive housing. I hope you will vote to support that need in favor of expanding Kimball Court.

Most sincerely,
Dr. Barbara Swanson
343 E. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55101

Dear Zoning Committee Members:

My name is Mary Miller and I am a 6 year resident of St. Paul.

I am reaching out to you to voice my support of Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative and the expansion of Kimball Court they are proposing at Snelling Avenue.

I have been following Beacon's work for the past 2 years and have been impressed with the quality of the homes they build and the care that goes into both the buildings and the tenants.

Now more than ever, across the city and region, we need more housing of all kinds; the current pandemic and economic climate is worsening what was already a crisis of too many neighbors without shelter. We know that permanent supportive housing can break the cycle of homelessness by providing a supportive community to allow people a chance to stabilize their housing, improve their health, and work toward their life goals.

Thank you for your attention. When it comes to a vote on Kimball Court, I hope you will vote with your values so that more neighbors can have a home.

Sincerely,

Mary Miller

1664 E. Shore Dr., St. Paul