

Dear President Steinke and the Board of Directors of Luther Seminary,

I am writing to share with you my views on the proposed development on the Luther Seminary campus near the intersection of Como Avenue and Luther Place. I have worked in the field of historic preservation for the past twenty years, and have been with the Preservation Alliance in Minnesota since 2008. I am also a member of St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church, have two children who are current students at Murray Middle School, and my family's ties to St. Anthony Park span five generations. Like many others in this community, I feel that I have a lot at stake with the proposed development.

While I am not opposed to the development in total, I believe that there is still much work to be done for the development to be an appropriate addition to this neighborhood. The physical constraints of the site present challenges that demand more than a one-size-fits-all approach. I attended the last two of the three recent community meetings and reviewed the revised site plan as presented. The development team would make it seem that it's just a matter of refining the design details to meet the desires of the neighborhood. I disagree. The site plan alone indicates a serious mismatch between the site and the proposed construction.

From a preservation standpoint, I am concerned that the plan calls for demolishing three old houses as well as a significant number of mature oak trees and one of the terraced hillsides that are character-defining features of this historic neighborhood and its park-like topography. While these houses have not yet been designated historic, that does not mean that they are without value. The environmental impacts alone of demolishing these houses and throwing them in the trash would be lamentable. Economist Donovan Rypkema has estimated that one square foot of building debris is equivalent to not recycling 192 aluminum cans. Conservatively estimating the size of these houses at 2,500 square feet apiece, that adds up to 1.4 million cans - the same environmental impact as if the entire St. Anthony Park population of 7,657 residents curtailed their pop can recycling for the year, or if Luther's 622 students (assuming each has a habit of one Diet Coke or Red Bull per day) stopped recycling their cans for over six years. Removing massive quantities of earth and trees will leave a carbon footprint in the shape of heavy equipment and dump trucks, not to mention noise and disruption for neighbors, area business patrons, congregation members, and students. Without a doubt, the demolition of these buildings and regrading of this site for new development will have a significant environmental impact that should be acknowledged, and then avoided altogether or sufficiently mitigated.

I do commend Luther and the development team for working around the designated historic structures Muskego Church and Bockmann Hall, although the proximity, scale, and design of the proposed new building may still be of concern. I urge you not to undervalue the history of the rest of the campus in pursuing this development. If demolition is to proceed, these three houses should be assessed for their potential historic value and alternatives, such as relocation, should be pursued.

The proposed regrading of the site will have an environmental impact, and a social impact, as well. I am concerned about the Murray students who walk to and from school, and also to and from their athletic fields at Valentine and Brompton, as they encounter the construction activity at this site. As the parent of a current 6th grader who is lacking in both stature and somewhat in common sense (as are most twelve-year-old boys), the proximity of heavy construction equipment and small bodies spells disaster in my mind. Any development of this site will have to take into account how Murray students and neighborhood residents are likely to traverse or bypass the site and make allowances to ensure their safety.

From a design standpoint, I am concerned about the scale of the building and how it will present itself to the street. St. Anthony Park enjoys an eclectic character with residential buildings of various sizes, styles, materials, and periods of construction. It would seem that, in a neighborhood like this, "anything goes." Residential buildings of the scale proposed are unprecedented, however, and so is the way the proposed

building would present itself to pedestrians. Any new construction on this site should have a traditional, street-front character, with a front facade parallel to the sidewalk, a raised foundation, and front porches or entrance stoops. Garage entrances should be at the rear of the site; this is a neighborhood built for people, not cars. A building that is 20-30 units in size, rather than the 50-60 proposed, would stand a much better chance of fitting on the site and having facade elements in scale with the predominant single-family residential character of the neighborhood.

From the comments that the development team have shared at the recent community meetings, I understand that there are still numerous details to work out. Concerned citizens like myself have been accused of rushing to conclusions, yet we've been presented with very little information on which to base a more measured response. As long as the site plan is all we have to go on, I don't believe that this project could ever be made to fit appropriately on this site and in the existing neighborhood context. As the design of the proposed building is developed and refined, I hope that you will give the utmost attention to its scale, massing, setting, materials, environmental and historical impact, and to the historical and physical context of the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Erin Hanafin Berg

Preservation Support Services Manager | Preservation Alliance of Minnesota