

November 13, 2015

Dear Neighbors,

Luther Place is only one block long. It is bordered by a middle school, a seminary, a church, a condominium building, and homes. It is lined and draped with mature oaks, maples, lindens, and pines. Overflow parking on both sides of the street provide hospitality to all of these neighbors and their guests. The street also welcomes students from the University of Minnesota whose limited budgets can use the free parking it offers. Customers for the businesses at this end of our village also need those parking spots on Luther Place. This one small block in St. Paul has all the density it can handle.

At the last Land Use Committee we heard the determination of Ecumen to build a 54 unit co-op on the Luther Seminary hillside where three heritage homes now sit. Trees removed, hillside pulled away, a building three times the cubic volume of Luther Place Condominiums will fill those three lots. Underground parking will not accommodate all of the couples buying into the co-op who drive two cars. There will be overflow ground parking from the co-op added to the competition already in place.

For us, this is too much. We ask the board of directors of Luther Seminary and Ecumen to refocus their efforts on placing all three proposed buildings for senior living in a Life Continuum Community on the lower campus as the best model for aging. A new co-op building for independent living can be nestled at the end of a cul de sac next to the wooded hillside there. Well designed end units could have a woodland master bedroom balcony and a martini sunset-skyline terrace. Middle units would offer one view or the other.

What to do with the upper campus that will provide income for Luther Seminary? When doing our research to preserve green space, we called the Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society. The kind staff person there pulled up a topical map of St. Anthony Park. She noted that the upper campus has two buildings on historic registries: Bockman with its great lawn and Muskego Church. The heritage era homes were also noted. Taking it all in, she described the upper campus of Luther Seminary as an historic district within greater St. Anthony Park. Her suggestion was that application be made to the Minnesota Legacy Fund to have those homes updated and preserved.

Then what?

Just as national parks write contracts with concessionaires, Luther Seminary could enjoy lasting annual income from a vendor who would create a bed and breakfast business using all four homes. Priced well for a nightly rate, the business income generated over a year would be quite remarkable. Who would stay in these guest houses? People attending conferences at the seminary and the University of Minnesota. Well marketed to graduates of Luther Seminary who want to visit Minneapolis and St. Paul, added income is assured. Imagine the wedding party weekends of all the churches in St. Anthony Park and the greater area who would love to have their families and friends stay right in the village. Out-of-towners, once they know of this resource, would come for state fair, ballgames, arts and entertainment and more. Price it right, and they will come.

Luther Place, may we honor your generosity so freely given to St. Anthony Park and protect you from being pushed beyond your limits. We ask like minded neighbors to raise their voices in support of redirecting both the board of directors of Luther Seminary and Ecumen to a master plan for senior housing on their lower campus that is striking to the eye and award winning. Please, leave the upper campus as a unique historic district for generations yet to come.

Douglas and Jane Koons