

To the Editor:

Mather Lifeways asks for seventeen variances from the zoning ordinance for its new buildings at Hinman and Davis. Any development requesting this much relief has to be out of scale with its neighborhood, as this is.

The amount of relief Mather asks would be harmful anywhere, to the surroundings and to the future efficacy of the zoning ordinance, but it is particularly so here on the only two blocks in the entire city where R6 (the highest density residential zone) shares the block with R1 (the lowest density residential zone).

The Comprehensive General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance are clear and explicit in their intent to moderate the difference between contiguous districts and carry out the City's agreed upon policy to graduate height and bulk from high to low to protect neighborhoods from the harmful effects of big buildings.

Close quarters and the juxtaposition here of R6 and R1 show why zoning matters and what zoning is meant to do. In this location, any extra height or lot coverage given to Mather immediately takes something from someone else.

The heart of the problem is that Mather does not have the land to build what it wants.

The City has protected numerous neighborhoods with re-zoning and other zoning decisions in recent years. Why would this neighborhood be different?

We should understand the consequences of what we do. Were this outsized complex to be built, what would be the incentive to deny the next one? If this development is right, why is it not right for Hyatt to come into some other neighborhood in Evanston and do the same? If senior living is what makes the difference, why not let Evanston's other worthy causes and institutions – its hospitals, its university, its many churches – build whatever they ask?

Everyone wants Mather to build. But it is not good for this neighborhood or the City to allow variances of this magnitude which disregard the letter and the intent of our zoning code.

Zoning ordinances, when disregarded, become meaningless. The only way we can exercise control over the future is by controlling the present.

Holly Reynolds
204 Davis Street

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