

Mather Should Not Get Zoning Changes

Editor:

Ours is a long-standing Evanston neighborhood. The homes here are located in a narrow residential corridor, east from Hinman Street, that stretches north-to-south and separates Evanston's

increasingly congested downtown from the city parks that border Lake Michigan.

The houses (mostly single-family residences) were built from the 1870s to the 1950s and represent a range of classic American architectural styles. This narrow green corridor provides visual delight for anyone who makes the short stroll from downtown to a lakeside park.

Our neighborhood is not part of downtown, either in appearance or in spirit. Even Evanston's Comprehensive General Plan, which defines the city's vision for development, sees the district to be strictly residential. Existing zoning codes, if observed, would keep it that way, as would the intended impact of this area's historical district designation.

Mather Lifeways' extraordinary petition for zoning changes include requests for: (1) a bigger building footprint on the lot (with the buildings covering over 72 percent of the lots, rather than 50 percent of each lot as permitted by code); (2) significantly taller buildings than permitted by zoning code, and (3) much greater resident populations than permitted either by code or within the upper limits of dispensations permitted under Planned Development. (For full details check the neighborhood website: www.cityofevanston.org)

In addition to all that, Mather Lifeways wishes to commercialize over an acre of R1 (single-family residential) lots with a parking structure. One immediate consequence of this would be to narrow Evanston's lakeside residential corridor to one single block: a very short distance measured along Davis Street from Judson Avenue on the west to Sheridan Road and the City park on the east. The implications of such a move should be readily apparent for those who are aware of an ever-present "push to the lake" by condo developers.

Zoning codes, in any community, are established to provide guidelines for construction and to give home owners – and, for that matter, all property owners –

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some reasonable degree of assurance as to what to expect in coming years.

Zoning codes are a community-wide expression (and understanding) of what kind of development is agreed upon to promote the best sort of community that people want to live in or that they wish to pass along to those who come later. It is part of the "vision thing." Exceptions here and special considerations there can add up over time. A piling up of zoning dispensations upon zoning dispensations create an Evanston far different from the one anyone would like.

Mather Lifeways' requests for extraordinary zoning changes should be rejected.

—Robert V. Eagly