



June 12, 2017

Grand Rapids Planning Commission
Grand Rapids Planning Department
1120 Monroe NW
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

RE: 74 Lafayette Avenue NE

Dear Members of the Grand Rapids Planning Commission,

For the Heritage Hill Association and its neighbors, this proposal has been a somewhat contentious one among Heritage Hill neighbors, with neighbors supporting or opposing the application. There is, however, agreement that most would prefer that a home built for single-family residential use stay a single-family residential home. The mission of maintaining the historic fabric and value of the historic homes in our district, as well as the neighborhood residential quality, has continued for decades.

Therefore, the Association cannot support or oppose this special land use application, but offer the comments below for your consideration. This position should not be construed as encouragement of, or precedent setting for, the use of residential homes for non-residential purposes. Over the years, our large and stately homes have been a target for non-residential use, with many past variances "grand-parented in" to earlier non-residential uses.

In representing neighbors, the Association has used a cautious approach in taking positions, especially when there is a clear split among neighbors.

- 1. The proposal is only partially consistent with the neighborhood policies of the Association's Master Plan of Heritage Hill.** This plan was recognized by the Grand Rapids Planning Commission in 1988 "as a reference guide for decisions which affect the future of the neighborhood" and was updated in 2005. One policy in the plan encourages "the use of existing structures for the purposes for which they were built." In this case, a residential structure is being proposed as a social service facility, with some non-treatment residential uses on the second floor.
- 2. Unnecessary Hardship.** The proposed use is not consistent with the LDR zone. When the house was purchased by the applicants from the GRCC Foundation, it was purchased at a reduced price with no conditions on the sale, assuming they could get a variance to increase their presence in the neighborhood. Without the variance, the property then became a hardship.
- 3. Not Self-Created.** The need for a variance is self-created by the applicants, purchasing the property without conditions that would require a special land use approval before the sale was finalized.
- 4. No Substantial Detriment.** The proposed use as a social service facility may not alter the essential character of the neighborhood compared to its immediate past use. However,

some neighbors are very concerned by potential impact of expanded use in the future, future expansion of catering “pure” residential use of the house, parking, traffic, the proximity to busy major institutions, among other issues. Some neighbors wrote letters or may speak to their concerns at the public hearing.

5. Cannot Be Reasonably Used. The property could be used as permitted in the zone. However, the applicant cites the original purchase price and the commercial kitchen as impediments to the sale and use as a single-family residence.

6. Conditions. If the Planning Commission approves the variance, the Association would recommend conditions that would restrict the use for this applicant and future owners to those described in this proposal. Therefore, the Association recommends that the following conditions, as a minimum, be included:

- a. The hours of operation will be 8:00 am – 5:30 pm, Monday through Friday.
- b. The counseling and other onsite intervention services, as described, (except emergencies) will be limited to 25/month.
- c. Require the requisite number of parking spots (residential & commercial - 6?) to be secured.
- d. The use of the second floor should be limited to residential (non-rental for family or guest speakers).
- e. If catering is allowed, specifically limit it to supporting the Sanford House and John Street properties which are part of applicant’s operation, i.e., no outside catering.
- f. Require vans for food and other deliveries (not trucks) during normal operational hours.
- g. Prohibit large educational offerings at the property. (large gatherings could be hosted at rented facilities)

On behalf of the HHA Board, I thank you for the opportunity to comment and ask that you consider our comments.

Sincerely,

James Payne,
President