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50th & France parking lot could become affordable housing

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SEPTEMBER 30, 2019

UPDATED: OCTOBER 4, 2019 - 8:46 AM



City Council Member Linea Palmisano (Ward 13) asks for community input on a plan to turn a city-owned parking lot near 50th & France over to a developer willing to build affordable housing. Photo by Zac Farber

Minneapolis is considering turning over an 83-space, city-owned parking lot next to the 50th and France shopping district to a developer willing to build an affordable housing project on the site.

City staff said it should be possible to erect a three-to-four-story apartment building with 40–50 multi-family units on the 30,000-square-foot lot, which takes up nearly half a block on the west side of Ewing Avenue between 50th and 51st streets. The hope is that some units would be affordable to families making 30%–50% of the area median income, said Andrea Brennan, the city’s director of housing policy and development.

While officials insisted that any development plan would preserve some quantity of public parking, many neighborhood residents, businesspeople and property owners strenuously objected to any decrease in the number of spots near the commercial district.

“That parking facility is the lifeblood of the east side of France Avenue,” said Richard Abdo, who owns the building currently occupied by Equation, a women’s clothing boutique, and Chuck & Don’s, a pet supply store. “My tenants rely on it. Customers rely on it. ... In my view, this is absolutely unconscionable.”

Ward 13 City Council Member Linea Palmisano said changing the lot was “not a fait accompli” and requested input from the community at a Sept. 24 Fulton neighborhood meeting attended by about 60 people.

Palmisano said the city’s goal of adding density and affordable housing in every part of Minneapolis made the Ewing Avenue parking lot one of the most attractive sites for development in all of Southwest, where property values are high and undeveloped land is in short supply.

“We are a city that’s growing,” she said. “In this area and only this area we get to make choices about the type of housing that’s being created and that can be done with land use and zoning.”

Palmisano said the city may conduct usage and traffic studies before issuing a request for proposals for the lot. “We know cars don’t shop; people do,” she said. “We’re less sure as to who’s using that lot.”

Lynda Smith, who owns the Arthur Murray Dance Center at 5041 France Ave., responded that “the cars are shoppers in that parking lot” and said if the lot were removed she would not re-

new her lease. “My clients are not in the neighborhood,” she said. “It would impact my business severely.”

Fulton resident Andrew Michaelson told city officials that he appreciated their looking “at the assets the city has in [one of] the only viable developable parcels for affordable housing in the whole ward.” “I am for this process,” he said.

The Ewing Avenue parking lot was created in a partnership between the 50th & France Business Association and the city, according to Bob Sykes, a member of the 50th & France Special Service District’s advisory council.

In the mid 1980s, a small group of local commercial property owners banded together to buy a row of single-family homes on Ewing Avenue, Sykes said. The city bought three of the properties and an additional property was donated. Sykes said the city assessed the cost of acquiring the three properties and building and maintaining the lot to the owners of about 30 Minneapolis properties in the 50th & France shopping area. In 2003 an additional property was donated and the lot was expanded.

Today, owners of 22 nearby commercial properties pay about \$42,000 per year to cover snow removal and other maintenance costs for the lot. There are about 35 different parking use agreements that would need to be revisited before any project can go forward.

“We’re three or four years from any sort of structure,” Palmisano said.

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Joshmo • 4 days ago

That is an excellent idea, only there is no affordable



That is an excellent idea, only there is no affordable shopping anywhere near that area, so those needs would also have to be addressed.

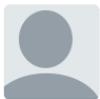
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



MyNickel · 7 days ago

Maybe you should find out then who IS using the lot. When I lived in the suburbs we would frequently go to 50th and France to shop and eat, had to park my car. So right, the car doesn't shop but it gets the people TO the shopping. If the lot wasn't there I would have gone to Uptown instead. Furthermore, the city acknowledges that this is high property value, yet somehow magically up to half the housing would be affordable? That is laughable. Another high buck high rise with no parking available to the 2 car high income residents. But more \$\$\$ for the property tax coffers I guess.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Blue Lilac · 5 days ago

Would it be affordable for someone making \$20/hour?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



James Blake · 6 days ago

There's nothing uglier than a surface parking lot. I look forward to the new neighbors in SW. The neighborhood doesn't need a parking lot as much as Minneapolis needs affordable housing and more housing in general due to low vacancy rates driving all rents up. It's at 3.39% when a healthy market is 5% or greater vacancies.

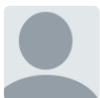
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A Bruce Boraas · 6 days ago

This lot is needed parking for the area, I would not go there is the lot is gone, what a hare brained idea.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



JDO1947 · 6 days ago

The Minneapolis Mayor and his City Council are coming! Lock your cars and get ready for cardboard signs!

