

At 288 units on about one block: Proposal stuns neighbors

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At 6:30 p.m. on June 13, the little community room at Main Street Lodge was packed with neighbors, some of whom had received only hours' notice of the meeting. The air became stuffier as tempers flared and the meeting continued. Folks in St. Anthony West were not happy.

The St. Anthony West Neighborhood Organization (STAWNO) called the meeting on short notice to allow developer Solhem Company to present their plans for two new apartment buildings on Main Street. The Main Street Apartments would face each other on Main Street and take up most of the block from 10th to 11th Avenue NE. They are dubbed "East" and "West." Solhem plans to construct the buildings to meet LEED requirements.

The East building, shaped like a backwards numeral 1, will contain 175 apartments, 113 parking stalls and 230 bike parking stalls. It will be five stories tall, but a 14-ft. elevator override makes it a six-story building. Five single family and one multi-family residences, from 1011 to 1027 Main Street, will be demolished to make room for the almost 170,000-sq.-ft. building.

The square-ish West building will also be six stories tall. At 104,209 square feet, it will hold 113 apartments, 68 parking stalls and 150 spaces for bicycles. The majority of the ground-floor apartments will be walk-up units. Three dwellings on this side of the street, from 1018 to 1024, will also undergo the wrecking ball.

Architect Craig Hartman, Momentum Design Group, said the buildings have two distinct styles. The East building is the larger site and is designed to blend in with Stonehouse Square across the street. It's also meant to be a buffer between Broadway and the neighborhood. The West building will "step down" as it approaches the neighborhood.

Construction on both buildings would begin this fall, pending City of Minneapolis approval. They would be complete by spring 2021. Solhem would own and manage the property, as it does The Julia on Broadway and Marshall.

Neighbors wasted no time in taking the STAWNO board and the developer to task.

Proposal stuns neighbors

“No” parking

Parking – the lack of it – was a major concern.

Solhem developed The Julia, which charges residents \$125-\$175 per month for indoor parking. Some of the building’s residents opt for street parking instead, parking a good distance away from the building. One man said, “I can’t park in front of my house.”

Greg Baumberger, Catholic Eldercare’s Chief Operating Officer, speaking about nearby Wyndris, said that not all renters use bicycles for transportation. “Some have [both] cars and bikes.”

He noted the high numbers of seniors in the area and said, “In 2030, one in five people will be 62 years or older.”

Traffic is another concern. Kathy Heidelberg said, “People go from the Julia through the alley to 8th Avenue. We have three times the amount of traffic we had before. We need to have a balance.”

Emily Scott said that traffic moves too fast on the 8th Avenue/Plymouth Avenue Bridge. “People drive on it like a freeway,” she said. “They don’t stop for people [in the crosswalks].”

Annette Warner, who lives on 7th Avenue, said it sometimes takes her ten minutes to drive two blocks. “This isn’t going to be Minneapolis anymore,” she said. “It’s going to be New York.”

Gaining more renters, losing owners

The neighbors are not eager to see more renters move into St. Anthony West. However, all of the properties that will be replaced by the apartments are rented.

Most of the homes were built in the 1970s. The oldest house in the group is at 1024 Main. The two-story yellow brick home was built in 1900 by the brewmaster of Minneapolis Brewing Company (Grain Belt). Although it is not on an historical register of any kind, neighbors consider it “historic.”

Liam Scott reproached the developers for “taking advantage of people aging out of their homes. Renters come and go. They have no investment in the neighborhood.”

When asked about the properties listed in the proposal, Solhem said the properties had already been acquired. A collective gasp went up from the crowd, and more than one neighbor turned to another and said, “I told you it was a done deal.”

Proposal stuns neighbors

Sheila Biernat echoed the sentiments and perhaps the fears of many in the room. “Northeast already had density,” she said. “Do we need more here? What other plans do you have for Northeast? Are you going to take down more houses? Have we reached a tipping point?”

Fitting with the neighborhood

Although neighbors liked architect Craig Hartman’s designs better than some they have seen in Northeast, they didn’t feel the proposed buildings reflected the character of St. Anthony West.

“Make something that looks like a home in Northeast,” said Emily Scott. “I don’t see families living in these apartments. There are no green spaces. Stonehouse Square looks like Northeast.”

STAWNO Board responds

After the neighbors had their say, the STAWNO board of directors had a chance to comment on the presentation. Chair Margaret Egan explained that Solhem had just given the proposal to the City of Minneapolis on Monday, hence the short meeting notice. She said Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) has made two initial reviews of the project, but has not commented on garage space.

The board seemed to have conflicting opinions on the project.

Alisa Mulhair noted that the plans for the two buildings fit in with STAWNO’s Small Area Plan. “Solhem has a good reputation and they are doing this in an appropriate area,” she said. “It’s not evil, it’s a strategy.”

Diane Hofstede said, “It’s our responsibility to create opportunities for home ownership. I want them [renters] to become part of the community!”

Michael Rainville, Sr., urged the developer and Third Ward Council Member Steve Fletcher to reconsider tearing down the brewmaster’s house. “I implore you, don’t tear it down. Make it into a coffee shop. You want us to change our culture; don’t make us change our history.”

Fletcher suggested to the developer to change the unit mix of the proposed buildings. “Add more two and three-bedroom units,” he said. “Look at ownership.” He said the City Council is moving to approve an inclusionary zoning law that would require developers to include affordable housing in their buildings. “How do we make this work for the community?” he asked.

On to the Planning Commission

The developer got a much warmer reception at the City Planning Commission’s Committee of the Whole meeting June 20. Commissioners

Proposal stuns neighbors

listened politely as Curt Gunsbury of Solhem and architect Hartman explained their plans.

The developers pointed out that the buildings are actually four and five stories high, in keeping with Minneapolis' current comprehensive plan, but not the six stories required by Minneapolis 2040. (However, the elevator overrides bring them to six stories.) They said the land beneath the proposed buildings runs downhill toward the river, so the buildings are "stepped" to accommodate the land.

Commissioners noted that the East Building will have a dog run on the south side nearest homeowners, and urged them to consider ways of screening the area with landscaping to reduce sounds and smells. With the exception of one, they liked the "pocket park" that will face Broadway. Commissioner Jean Coleman requested that they provide "human amenities" with it, so people who don't live there will realize it's not a place for dogs.

Commissioners also questioned the placement of the loading dock on the south side, an area the developers admitted they were struggling with. The developers asked for suggestions. The commissioners also liked the idea of pushing back the sidewalks and installing a boulevard with trees along Broadway.

The commissioners seemed to like the West Building better, though they questioned Hartman's color choices (rose-colored brick on the neighborhood side, and a startling white façade facing toward Broadway). Hartman asked what color they thought he should use, but didn't get a definitive answer.

Commissioners liked the step-up entrances on the Main Street side of the building, but worried about the width of the sidewalk on the south side nearest a single family home. They felt a narrower walkway would be less likely to be interpreted as a public sidewalk.

Gunsbury was chided for not making a bigger "thing" out of his plans to build LEED-compliant buildings. He answered, "I don't even think about it. It's just what I do."

The City Council will review the plans in early July.

Below: The yellow brick house at 1024 Main Street was built in 1900 by the brewmaster at Minneapolis Brewing Company (Grain Belt). Although neighbors view it as historic, it does not have a historic designation that would prevent it from being torn down. Most of the homes slated for demolition were built in the 1970s.Dr. Mike Doroschak, Doroschak

Proposal stuns neighbors

Dental, asked about parking around the proposed buildings. Sheila Biernat asked, “Have we reached a tipping point?” □(Photos by Cynthia Sowden) The East Building of the Main Street Apartments as it would appear from the corner of Broadway and Main. The West Building, looking north on Main Street toward the back of the 1029 Bar. (Graphics provided by Momentum Design Group)

Homes slated for demolition:

Address	Year Built	Current Owner	Date Acquired
1018 Main	1968	M Club Properties	2017
1022 Main	1971	M Club Properties	2015
1024 Main	1900	M Club Properties	2012
1011 Main	1970	KLP Real Estate	2015
1019 Main	1971	KLP Real Estate	2016
1027 Main	1972	D&D R/E Holdings	1996
1010 2nd Street	1935	KLP Real Estate	2017
1016 2nd Street	1976	KLP Real Estate	2015

Source: Hennepin County Property Records