



Statement regarding the withdrawal of our appeal of 438 Dorothy Day Place

July 27, 2024

Yesterday, Assumption withdrew our appeal application. In this past week, it became clear that the path to further conversations would be best served by this action. We will move forward with our concerns and can be more effective outside the appeal process. We want to explain how we came to this decision.

On June 17, 2024, Assumption received notice of a variance application for an 88-unit supportive housing project at 438 Dorothy Day Place, also known as Mary Hall. Prompted by serious safety and other concerns, Assumption submitted an appeal to the granted variance on July 2, 2024. This would be discussed at the St. Paul City Council Meeting on Wednesday, August 7, 2024.

Progress in our conversation

In the last two weeks, we have had meaningful conversations with Aeon and Catholic Charities. Each meeting began with the presumption that each organization wants the best for others, especially those in need. We better understand each other's mission, the people we serve, the challenges we face, and how each organization is working to keep their campus safe. As stated previously, Assumption does not oppose affordable or supportive housing. Having a home is essential for not only surviving, but for flourishing. However, concentrating vulnerable people in one place has proven to create negative consequences, especially for those experiencing homelessness or poverty.

Key Issues Remain

While each organization is responsible for security, services and ministries onsite, the greatest concern now is what is happening outside our doors. The following key issues remain:

1. The safety of neighborhood streets, sidewalks, and our campus.
2. The risks posed by concentration of vulnerable populations for the city, the neighborhood, and those in greatest need. For example, drug dealers come in to prey on the vulnerable.
3. Without resource and zoning changes, communities outside the city will continue to send those most in need to the city. For example, we are told that the only allowable location in St. Paul for an overnight shelter is downtown.

Conversations with Police and Public Officials

For years, we've maintained a strong relationship with law enforcement through regular meetings with the local police commander and police officers. We appreciate their service and sacrifice. Earlier this month, we looked more deeply into current problems. We discussed how, in the wake of St. Joseph's Hospital closure, we lost a healthy balance of vehicle and foot traffic. Exchange Street (and others) has become a "street of exchanges." Our local police offered some ideas and have begun implementing helpful tactics, such as a greater police presence, for which we are grateful. However, to significantly improve the situation, a more robust plan is needed. We look forward to shifting our attention to this important conversation.

Why Withdraw our Appeal?

We have used the appeal process to explore and learned more. Aeon has secured approvals and funding, and we have reasonably concluded that an appeal would be unsuccessful especially with a tight timeframe. We also realized that most of our concerns are beyond Aeon. Continuing an unsuccessful appeal process could put at risk important conversations if there is an attitude that "the matter has been voted on."

Through the Confusion, There is Hope

We know some of our decisions have caused confusion, and the coverage has not always captured our efforts toward respectful and positive dialogue. While we address concerning behavior, we need to avoid categorizing individuals and remember that everyone has dignity and a story. We pray for continued wisdom to see as God sees and love as God loves.

We are a people of hope. Assumption will continue to be here for our community. We want the best for the neighborhood and all who come downtown. We will continue to work for beneficial outcomes and do our best to be a positive force in the city we love and in the world around us.

Respectfully,

Fr. Paul Treacy, Pastor - in consultation with Parish Leadership