

BEACON BLOCK CLUB

July 19, 2019

Alderman James Cappleman
4544 N. Broadway
Chicago, IL 60640

Dear Alderman Cappleman:

As you know, developer Athenas Development has proposed a multiunit condominium building for the property at 4502-4504 N. Beacon. The proposed condo development replaces a surface parking lot, which in turn replaced a historically significant single-family home that was demolished many years ago. The developer has requested an upzone from the previous (single family home) zoning in order to complete his project as designed. The developer has requested an upzone to a B2-3 designation.

After careful consideration of the pros and cons of the new development, including solicitation and review of comments from our block club and interested neighbors at two in person meetings, consideration of the results of an online advisory survey, and consideration of emails sent to our block club email account, the Beacon Block Club board voted 2-1 in favor of the development and requested upzone. A discussion of our process and rationale is set forth below.

Online Survey

With respect to the survey, in the end, the vote total was over 300 (307), which represents extraordinary participation in a local (block club level) debate over a single development. We truly appreciate all who voted and commented, both within and outside of the block club area. Our success with the tool leads us to recommend the use of online surveys to you as a tool for future block club discussions outside of our immediate area.

For votes within the Beacon Block Club boundaries, the final total was **116** in favor of option 1 (granting the upzone as requested), and **96** in favor of option 2 (keeping the current zoning and asking the developer to build a single family home or a two flat).

There were a total of 29 votes from out of the block club boundary that were not counted in the official tally. We received votes from other streets in Sheridan Park, from throughout Chicago, and from as far away as New York City. None of these votes were counted in the final total. Of these votes, 19 were in favor of Option 1, and 10 for Option 2.

Another 63 votes were excluded outright from the final count. Although the votes answered the first question (the choice between Option 1 and Option 2), these votes did not give identifying information

that would allow us to verify the vote (or in one instance, gave a false identification). Of these votes, 56 were in favor and 6 against, with one respondent non-answer (Option 1/Option 2 not selected).

In comments, residents cited a variety of reasons to both support and reject the upzone. A copy of selected comments is attached for your review and consideration.

The most prevalent complaints involved the loss of the parking lot and/or street parking, the design of the building, the fear that an upzone would affect other structures in the community, the impact on community diversity, and the potential impact on rent levels. The most prevalent comments in favor included praise for the design of the building in relation to its neighbors, the additional density that it would create, particularly in relation to mass transit, the replacement of a parking lot with a residential building, the addition of new taxpayers, and the contribution to the continued growth of Sheridan Park as a neighborhood. More than one respondent cited the potential opportunity to buy a condo in the development as a reason for approving the upzone.

Board Discussion

In our discussion of the points raised in favor and in opposition, the board met and discussed the benefits and detriments of the development.

One clear benefit that was a primary topic of discussion was bringing needed larger condominiums to the neighborhood. We discussed our observations that over our years on Beacon many young families have been forced to move out of the neighborhood in search of more space as their families have grown and matured. We discussed the benefits that accrue from adding larger multibedroom condominiums and how the addition of those condominiums in a desirable location will encourage many families to consider remaining in the neighborhood rather than looking to move elsewhere in the city.

We also discussed the fact that this building is a condominium, rather than a rental. Given the trend towards construction of rental apartment buildings, the board agreed that the opportunity created by a condominium building will benefit the community at large, both in terms of encouraging stability (long-term residents) and in adding to the tax base.

We discussed the design and the relationship between the building and the surrounding multifamily buildings. Although one board member brought up his previous disagreement with an Athenas design (4627 N. Beacon), the consensus was that the design proposed is aesthetically appropriate in the context of the neighboring buildings. As most of you know, we recently rejected a proposal for 4530 N. Beacon because we considered the proposal out of scale with the surrounding buildings on the 4500 block. In discussing the scale of the building, particularly in relation to representations made by the developer's architect and attorney at the second meeting, we concluded that the height chosen for the proposed 4502-4504 building, including the setback facing Beacon, brings the building into substantial alignment with the other buildings and does not overwhelm the corner. We also discussed the balconies and were satisfied that the developer's modification to the design to shorten the balconies to 8 feet brought the building into alignment with the building immediately to the north.

With respect to the styling and coloration, we had a discussion as to the design of newer brick condominium buildings. We observed that the red brick chosen for the building is consistent with the

coloration of surrounding buildings, and after discussion agreed the design is appropriately considerate of the historic nature of buildings on the block.

In sum, we concluded after our discussion that the building will not affect the streetscape in a negative way.

With respect to garage access, our dissenting board member supported the development generally, including the size of the building and unit count, but voted no and stated his preference that garage access be moved to the alley.

With respect to parking, we had a lengthy discussion that considered the concerns of neighbors, including those who live in surrounding block club areas. We discussed the inclusion of on-site parking for one vehicle for each of the condominiums in the proposed development, along with an accessible spot for the disabled. We discussed how this will account for the parking needs of the condominium owners. We concluded the on-site parking included will help alleviate some of the pressures brought by losing the surface parking lot currently in place.

We also discussed the availability of on-street and off-street parking, based on comments raised at the meetings and online. We considered a lengthy list of parking options presented to us by a local resident. After reviewing and discussing options, we concluded that the loss of the parking spaces in the surface lot can be supplanted by available street parking, particularly on Montrose, and rental, including available spots at 4520 N. Beacon, 4620 N. Beacon, 4520 N. Malden, 4738 N. Beacon, 4742 N. Beacon, Courtenay School, and a handful of advertised neighborhood garage spots. We also considered the effect that conversion of Beacon, Sunnyside, and Dover streets into permit designated-zone parking would have on the area, and observed that the switch to permit parking on the 4700 block of Beacon as well as permit parking on Magnolia and Malden has alleviated most of the parking issues on those blocks. As a group, we believe that a switch to permit parking is advisable for area residents and encourage them to take up the signatures necessary to petition the city for the change.

After our discussion, we agreed that while there is no perfect solution to the parking “problem” as defined by the project’s critics, we believe that the parking solutions available adequately address the concerns raised by members and the removal of one or two street spots do not outweigh the benefits to the community at large.

We also had a robust discussion of the zoning and the value of responsible development. One board member commented that he would prefer less parking to encourage transit-oriented behaviors, but saw the necessity of complying with City of Chicago code. All board members agreed that it would be the position of Beacon Block Club that we will favor transit oriented development whenever possible and would encourage people to reduce their reliance on vehicles when possible.

With respect to zoning, the board agreed that the upzone to B2-3 was necessary for the project as designed but not ideal given the potential for future abuse of a commercial zoning designation in a residential area. As a result, the board reached out to the developer and requested that the developer agree to downzone the property to RT-4 after building the proposed project. The developer agreed, and his lawyer has prepared a covenant that will bind the developer to downzoning the property to RT-4 after the current project is built. The board was satisfied that this change adequately addressed the concerns relating to

future use of the property, as it brings the property into alignment with the zoning of nearby buildings. The board's approval is contingent on the developer signing the binding covenant, which was promised but not delivered as of the date of this letter.

Summary

In sum, the board believes opportunity for residents (and families) to purchase homes at this location will create additional stakeholders in our community, and the addition of multiple new condominiums will add to the area tax base. As a board, we believe these developments will be of great benefit to the 4500 block of Beacon, our block club, and the neighborhood as a whole, and believe the benefits outweigh the detriments.

For the reasons set forth above, the Beacon Block Club board endorses the project as designed and the upzone as requested.

We appreciate your consideration of this letter and hope that you will reach out if you have any questions concerning our process or final decision. If we can answer any questions you may have or be of any further assistance to you, please feel free to contact us on our block club Gmail account at beaconblockclub@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

/s - Dustin Fogle

Dustin Fogle
President, Beacon Block Club