



June 6, 2017

The Honorable Danny Solís
25th Ward Alderman
1800 S. Blue Island Ave.
Chicago, IL 60608

Re: Zoning Change for 935 W. Washington

Dear Alderman Solís,

On Monday, October 10, 2016, Jesse Levine (Verde Communities), Tom Kerwin (bKL Architecture), and Jerry Schain (Schain Banks Law) presented their concept for a proposed three-building development on the block bounded by Madison & Washington, Morgan & Sangamon then named "Union West". Representatives of Neighbors of West Loop were present at the December 14, 2016 community meeting for this development and again on March 15, 2017 when a revised concept was presented to the public.

Originally proposed to include an eight (8) story building on Madison, a fifteen (15) story building on Morgan, and a seventeen (17) story building on Washington, the concept now consists of a single-story building on Madison and two fifteen (15) story buildings. These structures will be connected by an parking deck on the second level. Originally planned to contain 405 rental units and 169 parking spaces, the proposed design now has 358 units and 196 parking spaces (plus 64 for use by nearby Haymarket Center). To erect the proposed buildings, the developer is seeking a zoning change from DX-3 (3.0 FAR) to DX-5 Planned Development with a 6.5 FAR.

Through various meetings, the West Loop community – including a consortium of 14 nearby condominium associations – has raised some concerns about this project:

- The proposed buildings heights along Morgan Street and Washington Boulevard are **significantly higher than nearby buildings** (whereas the proposed height of the building on Madison Street would be much less than that of neighboring structures).
- The proposed parking ratio of 0.54 is well below that of nearby residential buildings, which will put a **strain on the already scarce surface parking options**.
- The **overcrowding of #20 route CTA buses** will increase from the introduction of this project.

The developer provided a traffic study for the project that includes a number of recommendations, including an enhanced crosswalk at Madison and Carpenter. In reviewing the traffic data in the report, one sees that the operational performance of the intersection of Madison and Sangamon is nearly identical to that of Madison and Peoria, for which a signal is being recommended.



Since the most recent presentation to our committee about this project, the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) has initiated a study to create development guidelines for new construction projects in the West Loop. Through this process, DPD has advocated for increased density in the West Loop, which we support – to a point. In this case, the developer has not demonstrated to our committee or to the community why upzoning to the extent proposed is needed. As a result, **our committee will only support upzoning this property to allow building heights that are commensurate with surrounding buildings**, approximately 120 ft in height along Morgan and Washington and 75 ft in height on Madison.

Even if these modest reductions in proposed building height and density are applied, we feel that the resident concerns listed above need to be fully addressed to avoid overwhelming local infrastructure. Here are additional improvements that we feel will need to be included before NoWL can support this project:

- **All of the recommendations included in the developer's traffic study should be implemented. In addition, a traffic signal should be installed at Madison and Sangamon Streets** to improve capacity and safety. The costs for these improvements should be borne by the developer.
- **Increase the parking ratio for this project from 0.54 to (at least) 0.75** (which could be accomplished through a reduction in the number of proposed units).
- Gain a commitment from the CTA for **five more eastbound #20 bus trips each hour during the morning (7-9 am) and evening (4-6 pm) peak periods.**

Our committee appreciates the developer's willingness to meet with the group of local condominium associations to discuss the project and demonstrate that issues like Chicago Fire Department approval have been addressed. Through these meetings, the developer has made commitments that should be honored:

- Create a setback on the south elevation at 14 N. Sangamon, installing a 15 ft wall
- Provide additional setback on the parking level
- Use steel on the first floor elevation/façade to separate the glass windows and use more brickwork from the second floor to the top of each structure
- Designate the alleyway providing access from Sangamon for maintenance access only, i.e., not as an access point to the parking structures

We would also like to see the required affordable housing provided on-site, as well as affordable retail space in the ground floor of one or more of the proposed buildings.

If it moves forward, this project will result in significant contributions to the Neighborhood Opportunity Bonus and a donation by the developer (per an announcement made at the December community meeting). You have indicated that these funds will go towards a new STEM lab Skinner West Elementary as part of its expansion. While funding for local schools is welcome, it does not override the need to address the concerns listed above.



Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Matthew Letourneau
Chairperson, Development Committee
NEIGHBORS OF WEST LOOP

cc: Andrew Cretal, ZOM (ajc@zomusa.com)
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