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Blaine Repko, Principal, MAA, SAA, LEED AP

Council of the City of Winnipeg
510 main St.
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Sept. 21, 2022

Re: Item 37 of the Report of the Executive Policy Meeting dated Sept. 14, 2022

My sincere thanks to Mayor, Council and Administration for giving your attention to my concerns. I am writing to you in regard to the waiving of the re-zoning and variance fees assigned to the re-building of E-Mart Groceries at 157 Scott Street. My name is Blaine Repko from ANT Architecture Inc. ANT Architecture is the prime consultant on the rebuilding of E-Mart Groceries.

The corner store is a vital part of many communities. The presence of a small store which provides a service to the community and a home for a store operator, or a tenant, has long been part of the canon for building more dense mixed-use neighborhoods. A trip to the corner store for groceries saves time and fuel, as well as providing support for those who are unable to drive. For many seniors, it is essential for both nutritional and social wellness. The corner store improves the community, provides healthy social space, saves on energy consumption and enriches the experience of growing up in a neighborhood. The corner store provides a living for the owner and tax income for the city. E-Mart Grocery is one such store.

A brief summary of the background of this project is on August 18, 2021 an act of arson resulted in a fire that destroyed the E-Mart Groceries located at 157 Scott Street. The Fire not only destroyed the building but there was a tragic loss of life of a family member and injury to another. The insurer assessed the replacement cost of the building at $480,934.15 and this number includes all soft costs for the new building. Less the soft costs, I would estimate the replacement budget for the building is currently at $199.00 per square foot. The re-zoning and variance fees for this tiny lot are currently $20,242.67 . To put that into perspective, approximately $10.94 per square foot of that budget is currently the rezoning and variance costs.

The property is currently zoned residential and the old C-store was grandfathered in for commercial use. However, the City's policy is that under total loss of the building, the store would not be grandfathered and the property would have to be re-zoned. When we started the design process we were informed by zoning that the City favored a residential use for this property and would not be supportive of a commercial use. Due to the costs of rezoning and the unlikely acceptance of a commercial use of the property, we attempted to submit a residential use which would require the application for variances. This was due to the small size of the lot which is 41 feet wide and 45 feet deep.

Fortunately, the district planner contacted us when the plans were submitted for comment and informed us the City's actual intent for the area was mixed use and he would be supportive of a commercial property. We were informed this could be done with rezoning and our understanding was few or no variances would be required. The project was re-designed and when submitted formally we were informed by zoning there would be both re-zoning costs and nine (9) variances. This is largely due to the very small size of the lot. I would like to say that the district planner and zoning department was very helpful and supportive in finding a solution that would achieve a workable commercial design. However, the solutions through variances grew incomplexity, resulting the astonishing fee of $20,242 for a tiny building on a tiny lot.

So far, we have gone through the schematic design process twice, we have developed a drawing set for the re-zoning application, we have corresponded with the City and have gone through the application process, and we have applied our efforts as a delegation before the City. Most of this work was not part of the project and cannot be borne by the budget. These costs will never be recovered, but we feel it is worth the effort. It is our contribution to this story, an effort to turn around this unfortunate event.

Our city bylaws are good. They are necessary for the careful development and administration of our city. They are also wise, as they have provisions for exceptions to these rules. In this case we have a tragedy with loss of life, with injury, loss of income, loss of property, loss of a valuable service to a community. We have a very small and difficult lot to work with. We have an administration cost that is a heavy burden to carry. But also have an outpouring of support from the public and media, the support of the district planner, the support of the zoning department, and the outspoken support of the owner's councilor. I would argue that these are exactly the kind of circumstances that warrant an exemption.

That is why we are asking the City to waive the $20,242 re-zoning and variance fee costs. Let's get this project back on budget. Let's let Ms. Shin move forward and re-build her life. Let's give the community the service that is it missing. Let us show everyone how Winnipeg rallied around one of its residents in a time of tragedy and demonstrated what it means to be a good neighbor.

Sincerely,



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