

City of Richfield Planning Commission Meeting, March 22, 2021

Public comments on Item #1: Public hearing and consideration of a recommendation on variety of land use approvals to construct a mixed use development at the northeast corner of Lyndale Avenue and 65th Street

TO THE RICHFIELD PLANNING COMMISSION

Monday Meeting, March 22, 2021

As citizens of Richfield, we would like to express our concerns about the projected apartment-and-multi-use ("mixed-use") development being proposed for the northeast corner of Lyndale Ave. and 65th Street-- after closing and razing the single-story strip of small businesses running around that corner, some fronting on Lyndale, and some on 65th St.

As residents of the now highly-developed "hub" area of Richfield, living in a retirement facility apartment, we are concerned about the larger issues of the quality of life for residents of this very small, compact area, being allowed to grow ever more dense. Ever bigger, taller buildings are filling up the ca. quarter-mile of small business buildings, condos, apartment buildings and senior and independent living apartments. And just plain more and more are being pushed onto this piece of land. Is it really wise to go on overloading this single area of Richfield, for the sake of tax revenues for the city, without regard for any other considerations that make this area, and Richfield, pleasant to live in?

More development right here means more traffic, less green space, less light and more shadow, more pretty views blocked... for apartment dwellers of all ages and incomes. Many seniors reside in this compact area now who are using their life-assets, lifesavings, to purchase tranquility, peace and beauty, as well as utility and convenience, for their last years. The joy of Richfield is that it is NOT a wealthy, luxurious-class enclave, but a diverse, open, interesting, creative place to live, so near to all the culture and style of a big city, which people of middle and lower income levels can enjoy and be involved with.

"The Hub" itself, displays acres of unused, heat-producing blacktop pavement, ugly and dead-looking, surrounding struggling, scattered businesses and empty buildings, with a look of blight. Why not prioritize making it a viable area again, with a large family restaurant, a large, middle-range grocery store, and maybe a fairly large office building favoring small business and professional offices for rent? And make "The Hub's" huge paved area attractive (!), with beautification, with corners for benches and trees, shrubs, pots of seasonal flowers...? (Funds from the City of Minn. or County...?) Hire a lawyer to work with the lessees and their contracts in "The Hub"...

AND why not build a 3-4 story multi-use (or just-residential-unit) apartment building a block long, running east to west along the northern boundary line of the "The Hub" property along 65th St. (fronting north), using up some of that empty blacktop? And use a local design firm, not an out-of-state, national corporate developer. Give the business to the people of Minnesota, from top to bottom, to foster jobs for people here and for pride in our State—which is true community-building!

At least spread out any more multi-residential-unit building developments around Richfield. (And no buildings higher than 4 stories, for the scale of this residential city's "profile," please...)

Any more development right here also means more traffic. And by the way, why have yet another traffic circle, not a half-block away from the one at Lyndale and 66th? Seems a waste of space, expensive, and even absurd. There are so many traffic circles on Lyndale Ave., going south, that they almost cause vertigo. What is the rationale for another one a few feet away from the nearest one?

A last point to be made: the developer for ESG (on assignment from North Dakota but working for the national interests of his company), included as "amenities" to be listed as attractants for apartment-dwellers for this area, the "green spaces" of Richfield Lake and Wood Lake Nature Preserve. Let it be said that these two spots have reached capacity already, with regard to the balance of undisturbed natural habitat in relation to the number of people making use of them in all sorts of ways. The more natural habitat gets invaded, trampled on and "use" does do this, the more the wild beauty of nature declines and fades, and the creatures that need it to live, disappear.

Hopefully, some of these considerations will be given some thought at least, in the upcoming meetings and the decisions that result from them. Sensible, sensitive development that is deemed really needed has to be provided in a community, but it should enhance the lives of the most inhabitants as possible across all lines; and it should always protect nature, those "green spaces," that our physical, emotional and spiritual health depend on.

Thanks--!

Rich and Mary Lux

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Dear Commissioners,

I have seen a rendering of what, presumably, is being proposed for the 64th to 65th and Lyndale strip-mall site. While it is more than sad to see more small businesses depart, I understand that this is private property and can be sold at will. I hope that the city can put some restrictions on what type of development is constructed there. What I saw pictured is a 5-story building with commercial use on the first floor, and what appear to be residential units in the four floors above.

My input is that I would like to see Richfield begin to restrict new developments to no higher than two stories. We have quite enough multi-story buildings that are blocking sun from many areas of our community now. This can make for dangerous walking in the winter. Richfield purports to be in favor of and wants to promote walking and biking; but unless there are safe ways to do this, it won't be done. Attempting to walk the shaded, ice-covered sidewalks in the winter is risky. Tall buildings are one of the factors that contribute to that danger.

Multi-story residential buildings also bring about the questions of parking and traffic in the area. There are already several large multi-family residential buildings in this neighborhood, as well as many commercial/retail ventures.

Richfield wants to promote itself as a "hometown"; and yet, at the same time, seems to erase any semblance of what has made us a community with the hometown feel. I would urge you to consider keeping any new developments smaller and more in line with our hometown feel - the thing which attracts many to want to live here. I think that we're more-than-full of high-end and "market rate" apartments and condominiums. Although the city can't prohibit private-property owners from selling their property, perhaps it can at least maintain some degree of common sense about what happens with the future development, so as to retain some of our small businesses and residents.

Heidi Gaibor
6915 Wentworth

Public comments on Item #2: Public hearing to consider a proposed ordinance amendment to modify rules related to home occupations.

Hello Planning Commission members,

I am writing on behalf of my family in opposition of the proposed amendments to section 509.21 subdivision 10 & 11-J and wish for both proposed changes to be stricken.

I grew up in Richfield, and post-college came back to raise my family for which I've lived 8 years. "The Urban Hometown" is Richfield's slogan and a name derived from the fertile farmland that once occupied the area. To quote a specific part of Richfield's published description; "Although located in the middle of a large urban area, Richfield retains a small town atmosphere. The pace is easy, the streets are clean, City government is accessible, and community spirit runs high." These are all reasons why I chose to raise my family here.

What I implore each member of the committee to consider is how do the proposed changes align with these values, and if passed what it would tell the current and future residents of Richfield? A City that has so far done a good job leading in urban farming by considering the environmental, health and communal benefits it provides.

I am the next-door neighbor of (the Reese Family) for whom this amendment is very obviously targeted towards. My family greatly enjoys having this wonderful garden and corresponding CSA in the neighborhood. The service this particular CSA provides has quite literally improved my family's health and wellbeing. It has also served as a feature of the community, bringing us closer to many neighbors we otherwise may not have relationships with. These benefits are realized because we do not have to travel to an off-site pickup location and can stay within the immediate neighborhood.

It is understandable to implement forward looking restrictions on certain use of personal property that could be of detriment or cause danger. What does not make sense is; what the city is trying to prevent, by not allowing very occasional pickup/distribution of vegetables? This seems like an unreasonable burden, not just to the distributors but also the people picking up (many of which do not travel by vehicle).

Being the next-door neighbor to this CSA I can confidently say that traffic due to pick-up (one day per week, for a few hours) is virtually unnoticeable. In fact, there is significantly more traffic from other immediate homes, apartments and construction having vehicles come and go every single day, while also parking on the street. Considering this, any potential disturbance due to vegetable pick up is negligible.

I fear that moving forward with these changes sets a poor precedent to any future urban farm and/or other cottage business in Richfield. It shows we are not governing with care and consideration but with blanket policy towards nuanced situations. It is especially important to consider ramifications, given the current economic challenges that face the community, resulting from the recent pandemic. Every decision such as this reverberates much louder than it may have in the past.

My final concerns are: the use of the words "Continuous or regular" are very nebulous and provide no context. This would cause significant grey area in not just distribution of garden products but any products. Clarifying this further would be a significant task with much nuance needing to be added. Secondly, it's disturbing to assume these changes are a result of what sounds like a single traffic complaint, but with no input from other stakeholders prior to the proposal of these new additions. Thank you for reading and considering this statement.

Alex Asmus

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I have resided in the same home in Richfield since 1947 and experienced the many changes since the days it was only a Village. It is my understanding, originally Richfield crops were trucked to Minneapolis for sale and distribution. Obviously, the population of the City has grown (no pun intended) over the years and become an inner suburb of maximum density.

Recently, my R-1 property was within 500 feet of a home operating a part time motor vehicle repair facility in violation of Section 1, Subd. 11. a). The result was an increase in noise, equipment, on and off street parking, creating a considerable nuisance in the neighborhood. The part-time business was operated within the garage attached to the residence on the property. Despite complaints to City staff, the condition was not corrected until the tenants relocated.

Sale of horticultural products as a Home Occupation might create problems similar to those I experienced near my property. As I interpret the proposed amendments to the Zoning Code, onsite sale of horticultural products will not be allowed. If my understanding is incorrect, I strongly recommend no such activity be permitted.

Proponents of the sale of such goods admit they want to start a "cottage food business." I submit this is the very basis property is zoned commercial rather than residential. Such business will increase noise, automobile traffic and parking congestion, decrease property line setbacks and lawn area. Will the City allow such crops to be grown in the front yard?

Understandably, all the other suburbs studied by the City staff forbid onsite sale of horticultural products. I cannot believe this industry could produce significant income from home crops. In order to become profitable, I can imagine operators might abuse the ordinance. Crops grown offsite might be trucked in for sale onsite. Regular vegetables could be purchased offsite at ordinary prices and resold onsite as organic. Businesses could be operated from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. seven days a week. Such a Home Occupation would be very difficult and expensive for the City to regulate.

I do not object to homeowners growing a reasonable amount of horticultural products for use by their family, neighbors or friends. Likewise, donations to non-profits should be encouraged. Although, I do not know the requirements for participation, I suppose sales for profit could be performed at the farmers' market at Veterans Park on Saturday mornings.

Gary Olso
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Dear Planning Commission and City Leaders,

I am a long time Richfield resident, and first time Public Commenter. Thank you for considering these concerns and suggestions.

More than 100 years ago, the industrial revolution paved the way for explosive population growth and the migration of human populations from rural agrarian settings to urban dwellings. Since then, city planners have had their hands full, creating rules and regulations that make city living safe and healthy for all residents. There has been a lot to think about in this monumental human shift. One of

the themes that has helped guide urban planning is the concept of “zoning”; everything in its place, so that homeowners can enjoy safe, peaceful neighborhoods, separate from busy business districts, or the stink of a crowded turkey farm, etc.

This framework is helpful, but when applied with a heavy hand and without nuance, it creates problems just as critical as those it was meant to solve. Urban areas have become “Food Deserts”, and people who live in urban zones are at higher risk for obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. At the same time, food insecurity is a common problem in urban areas, with the most vulnerable individuals being children and the elderly.

At the same time, urban populations are losing basic understanding of where food comes from, and how our stewardship of the earth matters to each of us as individuals, and as a group. It is now common for children and even adults to lack basic understanding of how carrots, potatoes, peas, zucchinis, eggs, and meat grow and arrive on our plates.

Our sterile neighborhoods have led to predictably sterile lives. We can go all year without meeting a neighbor if nothing in our yards calls us out to work and mingle. Our children have allergies and sensory issues, because they have no dirt to play in. And none of us like to eat vegetables, because the crummy cardboard produce at the store has travelled here from another hemisphere, with predictable results.

As a result of these alarming trends, people in urban areas across our nation have started to push back against the clumsy zoning codes that have separated us from the food we eat. Historically, in what we might think of as “Urban Planning Version 1”, regulations favored very un-agricultural residential areas. There was a “slippery slope” fallacy underlying many of these regulations: “If we allow any chickens at all, pretty soon there will be a poultry farm in someone’s yard” “If we allow a tomato plant in a front yard, pretty soon there will be a field of wheat and a combine in another front yard”

Richfield has, in recent years, done a good job of keeping up with the latest emerging wisdom, as we recognize that a more nuanced approach to governing can provide freedom, peaceful living and healthy choices to all residents. That growing and sharing food is fundamental to the human experience, and that a delicious meal starts with a fertile patch of ground. We are now allowed to keep a small number of chickens, who are delightful backyard companions, and we can plant garden crops on our property, while keeping things tidy and attractive. This forward-looking attitude, similar to other progressive urban attitudes in our country, is what attracted me to Richfield and is why I have recommended it to many of my friends who have subsequently moved here. I have spent the 12+ years that I have lived in Richfield believing it to be an “Urban Oasis” -- somewhere that I can enjoy the amenities of city life, while also having the freedom to enjoy my property to its fullest, growing food and sharing it with my neighbors, family and friends. I have a COMMUNITY of people who enjoy these things with me, and its value for our health, happiness, and well-being cannot be overstated.

Specifically in question today is the “CSA” operation of one of our residents, and how an update or clarification to our city codes may affect them. It is my opinion Jason and Courtney’s yard, and the service they provide to our community, is one of the jewels of our city. I have not met them personally, but I think their vision and execution of an Urban CSA deserves to be front page news in any major media outlet. Their yard at the height of summer is jaw droppingly beautiful; I take time out of my way every time I visit Lakewinds to bike by and admire it, and I have sent other garden-loving friends their way to see it and be inspired! The service they provide to nearby neighbors of being able to access fresh produce at its peak is something that should be a basic human right, and yet has become so rare in our urban lives that we are here questioning it’s right to exist.

The only reasons I have heard to change or limit their ability to provide this service are so fallacious that I cannot believe the discussion has lasted this long.

First, there was the “traffic” complaint from a single disgruntled neighbor. In the case of this neighborhood CSA, the number of customers is somewhere around a dozen. And half of their customers are neighborhood residents who walk over to pick up their food.

My own neighbors have a weekly bible study that attracts at least a dozen cars at one time (in non-covid times) (and for the record I am not complaining!). I hardly think we are going to outlaw this kind of gathering. If I’ve been quite busy shopping, sometimes the Amazon truck will visit my house several times a day! And yet for some reason, the handful of cars that might visit this resident’s house once a week, for a few months in the summer, is a problem. Please, let us take this off the table as a supposed concern.

The only other concern I have heard is the “zoning” issue, with the “slippery slope” story in hot pursuit. “If we allow this tiny CSA, then what’s to stop another neighbor from opening a convenience store in their garage?”. And the clear answer is: Govern with wisdom and nuance!

You can make a decision to specifically allow VEGETABLES, which grow in our dirt, which create beauty in our yards, which create community with our neighbors, and which nourish our bodies. And you may simultaneously continue to uphold other regulations that limit commercial and larger agricultural enterprises in our beautiful city. You did it with simplicity and aplomb by allowing 3 chickens in Richfield yards. What a triumph -- we can enjoy fresh eggs if we want, while running no risk of suffering a commercial poultry enterprise in our neighbor’s yard. You can use the same simple language and common sense to clarify our rules in a way that continues to allow residents to grow and share fresh produce with one another.

Sincerely -- Stephanie King, Richfield Resident

Members of the Richfield Planning Commission:

My name is Debbie Eng and I am writing to you to provide community comment regarding the proposed ordinance amendment to modify rules related to home occupations, specifically Section 509.21, Subdivisions 10 and 11.

I am a Richfield resident who lives 2 houses away from Jason Reese and Courtney Kupsch. It is Jason and Courtney’s yard garden that has triggered the proposed changes before you regarding gardening or horticultural activities. I have also been the recipient of a variety of wonderful fresh healthy vegetables from their garden.

I am opposed to the proposed changes that would prohibit the sale or distribution of fresh healthy produce from a Richfield resident’s garden –

- The city should be encouraging healthy eating and the sharing of fresh food.
- Bee keeping and the sale of honey is allowed in Richfield. What is really the difference between these sales and product distribution?
- Jason and Courtney’s garden is considered an asset in our great neighborhood and is well kept and enjoyed by many families. People stop to admire the garden while out walking.
- Why would the city choose to deny this community asset? I have heard that “someone” has complained about traffic...the many neighbors that I have mentioned this to have been surprised and have stated that this has not been their experience. I also find this ironic given

the July 2020 approval for a new 88-unit apartment building, on the corner of 64th street and Lyndale Ave S (2 short blocks and on the same street from Jason and Courtney's garden) amid numerous traffic and parking concerns raised by myself and other neighbors.

Commissioners, I strongly ask that you reconsider the proposed language in Section 509.21, Subdivisions 10 and 11. It is within your authority to revise the language proposed before you. We are a wonderful thriving neighborhood which exemplifies Richfield's vision of an inclusive growing urban hometown. Jason and Courtney's garden contributes to this vision.

Thank you for your attention to my comments.

Deborah A. Eng
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