

Reeb

Testimony to the Albany Common Council, July 7, 2016

Don Reeb, president, McKownville Improvement Association

The ordinance being discussed is as follows:

ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 375 OF THE CODE OF THE CITY OF ALBANY (ZONING) CHANGING THE ZONING CLASSIFICATION OF CERTAIN PROPERTY LOCATED AT STREET NOS. 2 THROUGH 11 SANDIDGE WAY (FORMERLY LOUGHLIN STREET), STREET NOS. 3 THROUGH 12 SANDIDGE WAY (FORMERLY LOUGHLIN STREET) AND STREET NOS. 263 THROUGH 271 FULLER ROAD FROM R-1A (SINGLE FAMILY LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT) TO R-4 (MULTIFAMILY HIGH-RISE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT) AND AMENDING THE ZONING MAP ACCORDINGLY.

I spoke at the June 20, 2016 Common Council meeting and I appreciate that you are permitting me to speak once again about the proposed Loughlin Street rezoning.

The McKownville Improvement Association was founded in 1924. It represents a one square mile area that includes about 1,000 homes.

The Loughlin Street rezoning was discussed at public meetings of the Association. In addition, many emails were received concerning Loughlin Street. The neighborhood is opposed to high-rise apartments on Loughlin. The reasons given for the opposition are summarized as follows.

High-Rise-Dwellings Are Out of Character for the Area The houses near Loughlin Street, both those in the City and those in McKownville, are single-family dwellings, of one and or two floors. There a few condominiums and row houses in McKownville but these are also just one or two floor structures. **High-rise dwellings are out of character for the McKownville neighborhood and for the two remaining homes on Fuller Road that are in the City of Albany.**

Fuller Road is Over-Crowded and the Area is Over-Built SUNY Poly and SUNY Albany are enormous and successful. However, with their Fuller Road access roads, it is not surprising that Fuller is over-used. There are about 140 homes in McKownville and two in the City that must use Fuller to get to their homes. If the proposed high-rise buildings and 173 apartments on Sandidge Way are approved, traffic safety on Fuller will decrease—for everyone.

This over-built section of the City produces not only an overcrowded Fuller Road but also flooding along Fuller from a very high water table and run-off from storms. The two homes on Fuller in the City and much of McKownville are at a lower elevation than Loughlin as well as the two universities. **The approval of 173 high-rise dwellings for Loughlin Street will exacerbate both traffic and flooding problems.**

The Nearby Historic Jewish Cemetery Will be Further Harmed The historic award received by the Independent Benevolent Society cemetery needs to be respected. Cave-ins of gravesites, toppled headstones, inability to access the cemetery grounds, flooded graves—all of these and more have been caused by the nearby construction and flooding. **The approval of the 173 high-rise apartments for Loughlin Street will harm the historic cemetery as well as the other nearby Jewish cemetery.**

Investigations and Longer Term Intentions Columbia Development began purchasing the 11 homes on Loughlin Street before June 2014. The SUNY Poly RFP for a parking lot and dorm was issued the following year, March 2015. The Loughlin Street properties were the only ones that could satisfy the requirements stated in the RFP and Columbia was the only bidder on the RFP. It appears that Columbia might have had foreknowledge of the RFP.

In September 2015, New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman launched an investigation concerning the SUNY Poly RFP and the purchase of the Loughlin Street homes.

The SUNY Poly RFP was withdrawn. In the following year, 2016, a new SUNY Poly RFP was issued. It did not involve Loughlin Street properties. Dawn Homes/Columbia has now asked for the rezoning of Loughlin Street to permit the construction of 173 high-rise apartments.

If the Common Council approves the rezoning of Loughlin for high-rise apartments, it could imply that it both supports Columbia's questionable involvement with the original RFP and doubts that the investigation launched by the Attorney General has merit.

Dawn Homes said it would seek reduced property taxes and exemptions from local sales taxes and fees. This makes it doubtful that the City will gain sufficient property tax revenues to offset the additional public services required by the 173 apartments and tenants.

It could get worse. SUNY Poly might purchase the 173 apartments for a dorm. The City would then receive zero property taxes from the rezoned property. That is, approval of the rezoning by the Common Council might lead to the City getting zero property taxes from the high-rise project.

The present 11 homes on Loughlin yield the City about \$60,000 in property tax revenue. If the rezoning is denied the City will continue to receive the \$60,000.

One More Comment This concerns *The Expanded Full Environmental Assessment Form (EF)* filed for the Loughlin Street project.

1. The EF does not indicate the traffic impact on the Western Avenue/Fuller Road intersection.
2. The EF chooses to use 13,840 gallons per day estimate for the likely fresh water use by the 173 apartments. The report notes that the standard estimate would be 27,500 GPD.
3. The EF takes no notice of the historic significance of the nearby cemetery.
4. The PM Peak Hour Trip Generation data indicates 113 trips. It is recommended by the Institute of Transportation Engineers' that a detailed off-site intersection analysis be conducted if the number is 100 or above. Nevertheless, the EF says that because the AM Peak Hour Trip Generation is less than 100 the detailed off-site analysis need not be done. Why should this be allowed?

There might be other problematic portions of the EF. Therefore, it is recommended that the Common Council hire an engineer to examine the EF, to question the assumptions, use of data, conclusions and so forth. The cost of such a report to the Common Council should be responsibility of the applicant.