

West Marshall Avenue Zoning Study

Community Feedback Overview: Zoning, density, traffic, neighborhood character, property values

The concerns below reflect the general nature of neighborhood issues that city officials already have heard, as laid out in the May 18, 2018, **West Marshall Avenue Zoning Study**. However, here are some nuances — garnered from several community meetings and Marshall Avenue walking tours — that Union Park District Council asks the city to consider.

- Adding *student* density has larger impacts than adding *other types* of density.
 - Parking is a problem now, and more students mean more vehicles.
 - Most St. Thomas students live in the suburbs and surrounding areas — and a majority own cars; there is already significant on-street parking congestion on blocks with many registered student rental houses.
- Maintain a reasonable density balance of housing and commercial options across west Marshall Avenue. Support the residential *look* of the avenue (its streetscape) even as you add density and change zoning.
 - Deceptively huge amount of density on Marshall today in converted houses, and existing apartment buildings are much denser than most zoning code allows today.
 - Unlike Snelling Avenue, which is a Mixed Use Corridor, Marshall is a medium-density Residential Corridor under the city's Comp Plan.
- Bring more specifics to the dialogue about affordable housing.
 - How will adding density lead to more affordability? New apartments on this stretch of Marshall are expensive.
- Existing streets do not support increased density.
 - Marshall is one driving lane each way, which can make for long lines of traffic.
 - Frustrated drivers roar through alleys and down side streets to escape Marshall.
 - How will the city handle even more traffic on Marshall?
- More residents will not lead inevitably to higher use of mass transit or bicycles.
 - How might the city promote and incentivize use of mass transit?
 - How could developers and the University of St. Thomas promote it as well?
- Establish and explain the poor environmental impacts of lower density and teardowns.
 - Residential housing makes up 81% of west Marshall Avenue (56% single-family, 12% 2- to 3-family, and 13% multi-family rental). Accordingly, middle-class homeowners are typically the dominant voice in these discussions.
 - Renters are a growing presence in Union Park overall — and may represent the best opportunity for both affordable housing and conversion to multi-modal practices.
- The plan risks making money for developers at the expense of homeowners, renters, and residents who are engaged in making neighborhoods strong and sustainable.
- How will density affect property values for owners of older homes, some historic, who cannot easily sell and move?
- Focus more on zoning education – codes are confusing, and city's website lacks a simple overview comparing residential and traditional neighborhood mixed-use zoning codes.

The following comments come from UPDC community meetings earlier this year, breakout groups and a subsequent large-group conversation at the “public comment” meeting held June 5, 2018, as well as comments made during Marshall Avenue walking tours on June 10 and 14:

Area 1: River to Wilder (see Map 1)

Student housing: Registered student rentals may be single-family (SF) houses or duplexes within the Student Housing Overlay District, which runs to Snelling. We have since learned, from Jerome Benner II at DSI, that this zoning would allow a registered SF rental to become a student duplex — thus doubling the number of student renters.

- This is of great concern to many homeowners along the west end of Marshall, particularly between Cretin and Cleveland. **Keep single-family zoning in place until the student housing overlay ordinance is amended to prevent duplex conversions.**

“T-type” zoning: Avoid altogether close to the river and limit west of Cleveland, to Cretin.

- One stated fear is that developers are “salivating” to redevelop the Cleveland to Cretin stretch, which has a number of registered student rentals.
- One experienced landlord counters, however, that the cost of converting a SF registered rental to a registered student duplex could be cost-prohibitive, especially if the landlord had to sacrifice any bedrooms to get it done.

Town & Country: Remain a golf course, or someday be a prime redevelopment opportunity?

T1 in northwest corner of Cleveland and Marshall: covers five houses, when no more than three should be T1. According to a recent *St. Paul Pioneer Press* article by Fred Melo about the city’s proposed 2040 Comprehensive Plan: “St. Paul wants and needs to grow . . . 56 intersections where denser new housing, retail, transit stops and other important services could happily co-exist. That may mean lifting zoning and density restrictions, or taking advantage of zoning that already exists, to incorporate these future ‘neighborhood nodes’ into local planning.” Marshall/Cleveland is the only WMA neighborhood node in new Comp Plan.

Area 2: Wilder to Fry (see Maps 2 & 3)

Marshall and Moore: Despite a last-minute approval of the five-story apartment, this should be RM1 zoning. RM2 is inconsistent with neighborhood’s look and feel. Very strong community position that 4- or 5-story residential buildings are just too tall for Marshall west of Snelling.

RM1 vs. T1 zoning: Homeowners on or near Marshall expressed concern about small businesses. RM1 would allow conversion of older homes to multi-family uses while preserving neighborhood character and not turn Marshall into another commercial Grand Avenue.

Eliminate T1 at Wilder: Maintain the “natural break” of Wilder Street between the commercial stretch of the Cleveland-to-Wilder block and the residential feel heading east from Wilder.

- Marshall median spans Wilder and no stoplight; this intersection prohibits left turns; makes this corner impractical for the mixed commercial use contemplated in T zoning.

- Rather than adding more adjacent T1 zoning, remake the liquor store and laundromat to be more pedestrian friendly. Get rid of the suburban feel of a dominant parking lot.
- Could all businesses between Cleveland and Wilder collaborate to use those lots today?

RM1 at Pierce: Limit to “less than what is proposed,” such as a half block.

Other proposed mixed-use nodes:

Prior: little enthusiasm for T1 zoning here:

- Saint Mark’s School Gymnasium will remain, and it is hard to envision when developers would tear down and replace the relatively new 1960s apartment buildings on the other three corners.
- This intersection does not offer any north/south public transit.
- The city’s concept of neighborhood nodes with retail and other services generally places them within a 20-minute walk of one another. Thus, Prior seems too close to Cleveland to be a viable mixed-use node intersection.

Fairview: Adding commercial businesses could disrupt corner’s character, but some are for it.

- Given that the library and the historic Charles Thompson Hall for the Deaf likely will remain, the only options for new multi-family buildings are likely on the NE and SE corners; student housing dominates the latter today.
- Some nearby residents — already surrounded by student housing — fear the additional traffic and chaos that businesses would bring; other nearby residents like the notion of a walkable coffee shop or similar service from the library.
- Stoplight at this intersection; seems like an opportunity for north/south public transit.

Area 3: Fry to Hamline (see Maps 3 & 4)

Two people participated in the breakout session about this stretch of Marshall, and two others submitted ideas in writing. None of the four lives along this stretch.

- The two participants support the proposed increased density from Fry to Pascal; another calls it “a bold reimagining of this district.” None has concerns about potential building heights allowed by the proposed zoning changes.
- A third neighbor — a former employee of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency — calls for a “significant buffer,” such as commercial properties, between residential and industrial zoning. “It always creates problems,” she said.
- A fourth neighbor echoes the concern of any industrial zoning here, “in a city that is increasingly residential” and on a stretch that offers walkability to frequent transit, stores and services.
 - Change IT industrial zoning to T3.
 - The stretch of Marshall between Snelling and Hamline currently has no bus service from the 21A line. Would the city support the new Rapid Transit bus serving this stretch by 2020?