



preserve minneapolis

Statement regarding proposed Alatus development at 200 Central Avenue

Preservationists and east Minneapolis neighborhoods recently breathed a sigh of relief when Schafer Richardson revised its plans for a development at the Nye's site, within the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. At 30 stories tall, the proposed building did not reflect the character of the neighborhood and ignored historic district guidelines, and Preserve Minneapolis and other concerned citizens pointed this out. In response to pressure and feedback, Schafer Richardson updated their plans with a proposal more in keeping with the guidelines, the context, and the public's vision for the neighborhood. It was a moment worth celebrating, an important reminder that preservation and development can and should work *together* in the evolution of the city.

But our celebration is short-lived, as another proposed development, by the Alatus Company, again threatens the character of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. This building, planned for the current Washburn-McReavy Funeral Home site (historically the St. Anthony Commercial Club building), is 40 stories tall, *10 stories higher than Schafer Richardson's original plans for the Nye's site*. It towers over surrounding blocks and the adjacent former Pillsbury Library, an important cultural heritage site within the city and historic district.

We asked ourselves, "*How is it this developer did not learn from the Nye's proposal?*"

The proposed plan disregards the Historic District guidelines

It's possible that Alatus didn't realize that the site is within the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District, which has been both locally designated and listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1971.¹ This specific portion of the district historically had an eclectic mix of buildings ranging in height from one-and-a-half to three stories. In keeping with this precedent, the district guidelines state that "mid-rise, low-rise, and very-low rise building heights are most appropriate," and building heights "should not exceed eight stories."² Furthermore, the guidelines reiterate that new buildings should respect the characteristics of the area. This includes ensuring that the historic grain elevators retain visual prominence in massing and scale for the district.³ At 40 stories, Alatus's proposed building is clearly outside these parameters.

The visual impact is significant and not fully shown in the renderings

In addition, the proposed building does not meet the new-building guidelines for Mass, Scale, and Height. The guidelines stipulate that a proposed building should be considered "as seen from key public viewpoints inside and outside of the historic district,"⁴ yet none of the published renderings show these various viewpoints, meaning the public hasn't seen its full visual impact. Will the building be visible from Main Street, the West Bank, or the University? Certainly it will. It's undeniable that a 40-story building would dramatically change the skyline of the district, once dominated by mid-rise industrial buildings and mills.

¹ As detailed on the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission website:

http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/hpc/landmarks/hpc_landmarks_st_anthony_falls.

² Winter & Co et al, "Saint Anthony Falls Historic District Design Guidelines," October 23, 2012, page 129, 131. Available online:

http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/www/groups/public/@cped/documents/webcontent/convert_255677.pdf.

³ Winter & Co., page 129.

⁴ Winter & Co, page 104.



What matters is the surrounding historic precedent

Some may argue that precedent has been set for this part of the district, in which other non-historic high-rise buildings are directly adjacent, including a 9-story parking garage and a 12-story apartment/condo complex. While this is accurate, it is irrelevant, just as it is irrelevant for the Nye's proposal.

As stated in the district guidelines, "in general, a new building should fit within the range of structures *seen historically* in the specific character area" [emphasis added].⁵ The guidelines, developed in 2012, exist not to freeze individual sites in time but with an eye toward the broader well-being of the area. They are rightly flexible and allow for the evolution of the built environment *within certain parameters*, which this proposed building vastly exceeds.

Listening to the neighborhood

Beyond the impact to the district's character, the proposed Alatus development does not take into account the surrounding residents' plans and goals for the future of the neighborhood. The proposed high-rise will dramatically change the density of the neighborhood, which brings a host of questions over safety, traffic, and future growth plans, as is noted by the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood request for opposition.

All development in Minneapolis should not only consider city design guidelines but also be sensitive, aware, and respectful of how the neighborhood would like to grow, change, and develop. This important element of community planning and development is often overlooked, forgotten, or ignored, which only results in frustration and tension.

We urge Alatus, every future developer in this area, and others within Minneapolis, to meet with neighborhood groups, citizens, and organizations and hear *their* visions and goals for the area, from historic character to density issues to safety concerns. These discussions should happen early in the process, as true due diligence in the design process rather than a token public-relations measure after the renderings have been publicized.

Preserve Minneapolis understands and appreciates the stated desire for more density within the city. But there are many ways to achieve this. These designs propose not just density but *especially high* density, of a size and design that is not close to fitting the existing guidelines for an area that is beloved specifically for its historic character.

We strongly urge the Minneapolis HPC to reject this proposal and developers to respect the historic guidelines and the context of their sites, rather than disregarding them.

About Preserve Minneapolis

Preserve Minneapolis is dedicated to improving the quality of life in Minneapolis by celebrating, preserving, and revitalizing the architectural and related cultural resources of the city. We do this by hosting summer walking tours, "Breakfast with a Preservationist" and "Happy Hour with a Preservationist" programs, and the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Awards, and by undertaking targeted advocacy efforts. Preserve Minneapolis is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization.

For more information, please visit our website at www.preserveminneapolis.org or email us at admin@preserveminneapolis.org.

⁵ Winter & CO, 104.