

O-1617-10

Miller Neighborhood

NEUTRAL LETTERS

11/02/2016

To my Mayor and City Council members,

I am writing in regards to the proposed rezoning of the area in and around the Miller Historic District, which is up for vote at the next Council meeting on November 8th.

If you check the records, you will find that I initially signed the petition in favor, then signed a letter of protest and tonight signed a letter in favor. You may correctly deduce from that history that I am on the fence regarding this. Please know that this fence-sitting is not from ambivalence, but rather from conflicting passions.

This is a very complex issue, with valid arguments pro and con to be made for both sides of the debate. A simple document professing support or opposition is just not sufficient to indicate how I feel about the issue, hence this letter.

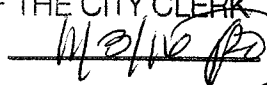
I should start by saying that my one overriding concern is the protection of the historical properties within the central core of Norman and particularly, since I reside here, in the Classen-Miller neighborhood, both inside and outside the historical district. That concern trumps all.

Having said that, I want to state that I am in agreement with everything that I have seen Russ Kaplan put in writing and have heard from him in conversations. Primarily what I agree with is his assertion that changing the zoning to R-1 will effectively cut off any incentive anyone would have to invest the large amounts of money required to rehabilitate many of the properties, particularly those near the train tracks, that could greatly benefit from such an investment. Without the potential for a homeowner to have an income stream, or an investor to have two incomes, from a garage apartment, the economics just don't make sense. That leaves the properties to further deteriorate, making them less and less suitable to be inhabited by the types of people anyone would want to have live down the street.

That should mean that I am opposed to changing the zoning to R-1, and I am.

However, my concern for the protection of the historical properties here trumps that. Leaving the zoning at R-3 provides no protection, as evidenced by the proposed plans to remove the 1920's bungalow at 106 Castro, just 4 houses down the street from me, and build a 5000+ square foot, two story duplex, with 5 bedrooms and 5 ½ bathrooms on each side and ten parking spaces in the backyard, in two rows of five, the only access to which is from an unpaved, barely-graveled alley that is today rutted with virtually no traffic. Such a thing is an insult to the spirit of the neighborhood. It is an insult to those whose properties will be irrevocably harmed by having such a misfit near. It is an insult to those that will have to deal with the consequences of having up to 10 people, most likely there illegally, with inadequate parking, residing in a space that was originally intended for a single family. It is a tragic loss of the historical charm that makes the central core of Norman the desirable place that it is, a charm that is under siege and is being lost on a weekly basis. That loss must be prevented.

So what is to be done?

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OF THE CITY CLERK
ON 11/02/16 

I think the best answer is a compromise solution that both protects the neighborhood and makes needed economic investment feasible. One likely answer would be a change to an alternative zoning, one that is less restrictive than R-1 but still provides some protection, perhaps RM-2. In addition, the overlay with design review that Mr. Kaplan has been advocating would be an excellent way to provide further protection.

But that sort of thing will take time, time we may not have to keep another bungalow from disappearing. Something needs to be done soon. Mr. Kaplan has said that he has pursued efforts with the Council to have a moratorium issued to prevent destruction of the historical property we have here so that time becomes available to find the better solution we all deserve. I am wholeheartedly in favor of such a moratorium, and the following efforts to find that better solution.

So where do I stand? If we can protect the irreplaceable historical property that we have, 100 years in the making, through a moratorium or its equivalent, then I am opposed to changing the zoning to R-1 and would help with efforts to find a better solution to combat the looming danger. I urge the Council to make such a move. If though, a moratorium is not passed and the neighborhood remains in jeopardy, I would, somewhat reluctantly, be in favor of changing the zoning to R-1 to gain the protection it provides.

The protection of the neighborhood trumps all.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Lessmann", with a stylized, flowing script.

Larry Lessmann
106 Miller Avenue