

May 29, 2014

Wendy Rampson
Planning Manager
wrampson@a2gov.org

Alexis DiLeo
City Planner
amdileo@a2gov.org

Re: Petition for Special Exception Use at 1919 Wayne

Dear Ms. Rampson and Ms. DiLeo:

As a resident and property owner within the Oxbridge neighborhood, I am writing to voice my opinion in support of the Jesuits' request for a special exception to purchase the house at 1919 Wayne Street. In taking this stance, I am in opposition with the position of the Oxbridge Neighborhood Association (ONA), of which I am a member. I am writing this letter because I do not believe that ONA represents the views of all residents in the neighborhood on this issue.

I am also a parishioner at St. Mary's Student Parish and therefore have some personal familiarity with the Jesuits requesting this special exception. I know them to be honorable, trustworthy men, and I take their word at face value when they communicate their plans for use of the property.

Since hearing about the pending sale, I have tried to inform myself about the issue by reading any available documentation and through informal conversations and email exchanges with neighbors, including members of ONA. I have also reached out to Fr. Dan Reim at St. Mary Student Parish to ask for clarification about concerns raised by neighbors.

I take the Jesuits at their word when they describe their plans for parking (using on-site garage and driveway space, as well as two spaces offered by the Board of Directors at the neighboring Church of Christ Scientist), their plans for internal renovations (limited as of now to adding two bathrooms, which makes sense given the fact that the home currently has seven bedrooms but only two bathrooms), and their plans for who would reside there (Jesuits or possibly seminarians, some of whom may be graduate students).

While I share my neighbors' concerns over the possibility of setting a precedent that could lead to fraternities or rental properties moving into the neighborhood, I do not believe that this fear should govern the present decision. Granting the special petition would create a one-time exception for the Jesuits only, and not a permanent change in zoning.

Furthermore, I believe that the Jesuits will fit comfortably within our Oxbridge neighborhood. Yes, they are priests, but they are both exceptional and down-to-earth individuals. Fr. Dan Reim, who initiated the petition, is highly active in St. Mary's social justice ministry, which includes advocacy for local immigrant residents facing deportation and homeless men and women

navigating the city's social welfare services. Fr. Ben Hawley, the pastor of St. Mary's, has an unusual background in having been ordained at the age of 53 after working in the State Department as a Director of the Peace Corps. You might run into Fr. Dennis Dillon, as my children, husband, and I did one weekend afternoon, at a matinee of the UM Gilbert & Sullivan Players' latest performance. A fan of all things literary, Fr. Dennis coordinates a summer film series at St. Mary's—the first showing this year will be the 1954 Italian classic, *La Strada*—and is infamous in the parish for always sneaking a Wendell Berry or other poem into his homilies. I realize that any one of these priests could be transferred to another location, but my overall point is that the Jesuit community is one that will contribute to the richness of our neighborhood fabric.

Moreover, they will not change the physical appearance of the neighborhood, to the extent that this is a concern. One need only look at their current residence at 1250 Ferdon, a home that they have now outgrown, to see that their home blends in with all the other well-maintained family homes on that lovely residential street.

In legal terms, the decision as to whether or not to grant this special exception hinges on whether or not it is appropriate to consider the Jesuits a "functional family unit." I believe that this would be a reasonable use of the functional family unit exception given the fact that Jesuits, by virtue of their vows and their membership in their particular kind of religious order, live a communal life characterized by pooling of income, shared domestic responsibilities, and permanency in living arrangements unless called upon by a superior to take up ministry elsewhere. In my opinion, a Jesuit household functions much more like a family than would residents of a co-op or rental complex, a fraternity or sorority, or any number of other non-traditional residential living units. I do not believe these latter groups would be able to petition successfully for this kind of exception.

I think we need to bear in mind why we have a "functional family unit" exception in our zoning code in the first place. Residential zoning codes are designed not only to preserve property values but also to foster community. As such, they create limits, but ideally they also have "safety valves" built in to allow exceptions in exceptional cases.

By way of closing, I would add that the Jesuits at issue here contribute tremendously to the betterment of the greater Ann Arbor community, both university and "townie," and Catholic and non-Catholic alike. I am confident that they will be generous and considerate neighbors, and I hope to be able to welcome them to the Oxbridge neighborhood.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Papp Kamali
2122 Dorset Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104