

ROGER J. MCCLOW
111 14th Avenue N
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
rmcclow@comcast.net

June 5, 2017

Mayor Richard Kriseman St. Petersburg City Hall 175 Fifth Street N. St. Petersburg, FL 33701 <u>Mayor@stpete.org</u>	Members of the City Council St. Petersburg City Hall 175 Fifth Street N. St. Petersburg, FL 33701 <u>Council@stpete.org</u>	Liz Abernethy, Zoning Official St. Petersburg City Hall 175 Fifth Street N. St. Petersburg, FL 33701 <u>Elizabeth.Abernethy@stpete.org</u>
--	---	--

Re: The Proposed Floor Area Ratio

Dear Mayor Kriseman, Members of the City Council and Zoning Official Abernethy:

Suzanne and I purchased a 1926 bungalow in the Historic Old Northeast two years ago. It was a dream come true. Our home had been lovingly restored by a former owner. It had all the features we loved – it is a spacious, lovingly preserved home surrounded by other graceful, historic homes on a tree-lined street. We walk to the Bay and to Crescent Lake Park, to the Old Northeast Tavern, to the Three Birds, to the Black Crow Coffee Shop, to the Palladium, to the Vinoy, to the Cinema and to all of the great restaurants in Downtown. We have caring, diverse neighbors. Suzanne and I felt that we had found an urban paradise.

Then, we began noticing that developers were buying and demolishing historic homes and replacing them with cement block monstrosities. These houses are so out of place that they actually shocked us and our neighbors (and still shock us) when we first walked past them. There are streets I can no longer walk on because these new cement block, featureless bunkers destroy my sense of tranquility.

These houses are generally not the designs of modern architects. Most often they are spec houses, cheaply designed and cheaply constructed to maximize the floor area so that the developer can maximize its profit. Often historic homes on larger lots are demolished, and the lot subdivided, so that more than one new, incompatible house can be built. This adversely affects both the character of the neighborhood and density of the housing.

A particularly pernicious aspect of this recent development is that lots have become worth more than the value of the home and the lot together. This discourages homeowners from maintaining their homes. One example of this is at 209 13th Avenue N, one of the original Vinoy Laughner homes, which as I understand, was recently sold contingent upon obtaining approval to demolish the home and subdivide the property into two or three lots. Because the home had not been maintained, it would cost a considerable amount to restore it. Thus, there is more value in the land, even though the home would have to be demolished, than there is in the existing historic house.

Page 2

June 5, 2017

A For Sale sign on a beautifully maintained historic home on a large lot at 1st Avenue N was recently changed from "Just Listed" to "Three Lots," an indication that this property too was worth more as "dirt" than as an historic residence. If this trend continues, and it will without action by the City Council, our neighborhood will be irretrievably damaged.

As property owners and as taxpayers, Suzanne and I believe that we have at least as much of an interest as developers in determining the future of our neighborhood – and, as such, we want the Historic Old Northeast to remain both "historic" and "old." We understand that dozens of our neighbors share our passion for preserving and protecting the Historic Old Northeast.

The City will address this issue in the form of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) regulations. Unfortunately, it appears that the City is considering regulations that would not stop, but would *accelerate* the current trend of the construction of huge, incompatible houses in the Old Northeast.

The City is considering a base FAR of .5 with "bonuses" of up to an additional .2 for design enhancements, for a total of .7. This is far too high. The average FAR of houses built in the last 10 years is, we understand, .44. Under the City's proposal, houses that are **at least 15% larger (and up to almost 60% larger with the bonuses)** than houses built in the last 10 years will become commonplace as developers build the biggest houses permitted in order to maximize profits.

The Neighborhood Review Committee currently recommends a base FAR of .4, but also with an enhancement bonus of .2. This proposal would, at most, place modest constraints on the size of new houses, compared to those built in the last ten years. With the bonuses, new houses could still be **40% larger** than the average of these existing oversized and incompatible houses.

This is clearly unacceptable. We believe that, given the character of the Historic Old Northeast, where the current overall FAR is about .3, a base FAR of .35, with small, targeted enhancement bonuses of no more than .1, would be an acceptable compromise between the interests of developers and neighborhood residents who, like Suzanne and me, are appalled at what those developers are doing to the unique character of our neighborhood.

One of the problems of a FAR regulation is that, unlike in the past, there will no longer be a mix of large and small houses. In the current market, developers will build houses at the maximum FAR. This is why the FAR should be consistent with the current average housing stock. Otherwise, the Historic Old Northeast will be pock marked with even larger, incompatible houses, built by developers as inexpensively as possible.

Please consider the interests of Historic Old Northeast residents who cherish their neighborhood. Please help preserve St. Petersburg's unique and threatened treasure. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Roger McClow

cc: Pamela Jones, Clerk, Development Review Committee (pamela.jones@stpete.org)