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205 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

June 5, 2017

Mayor Rick Kriseman  
City Council Members  
Development Review Commission Members  
Ms. Elizabeth Abernethy, Planning and Economic Development Dept.  
City of St. Petersburg, FL

Re: Amendments to St. Petersburg's Land Development Regulations

Dear Mayor Kriseman, City Council Members, DRC Members and Ms. Abernethy,

We very much appreciate the hard work, amount of time, thought, community outreach and effort given to the proposed amendments to the Land Development Regulations (LDR) as a tool to control area height and bulk of homes within the city.

After careful consideration, we are opposed to the FAR of 0.50 proposed by city staff. We have grave concerns regarding the ability of the recommended 0.50 FAR with proposed additional bonus points to effectively resolve the growing redevelopment problem of increasingly bigger and boxy houses in our traditional historic neighborhoods. We believe that, given the character of the Historic Old Northeast, where the current overall FAR is about 0.3, a base FAR of 0.35, with small, targeted enhancement bonuses of no more than 0.1, would be an acceptable compromise between the interests of developers and neighborhood residents.

For several years now residents throughout the city in the Old Northeast, Kenwood, Crescent Lake, and other neighborhoods have strongly expressed their concerns regarding the alarming increase of teardowns being replaced with oversized, "big box" redevelopment projects. We truly appreciate the significant time spent and efforts made to clarify and streamline the process with the proposed LDR amendments, while attempting to resolve the current ongoing problem rapidly transforming our traditional neighborhoods.

Since 1982 we've lived in our 1918 Historic Old Northeast home. The rampant development taking place all around our immediate NT-2 and NT-3 zoned neighborhoods and beyond deeply concerns us. Over the years we've attended many City sponsored public informational meetings, City Council hearings - meetings, DRC hearings, met with Planning & Economic Development Dept. staff members to voice our concerns regarding ongoing problems with redevelopment in our neighborhood.

Yet the teardowns and building of bigger and even bigger houses has only increased, as the House Size Comparison chart compiled by Ms. Abernethy clearly illustrates. We took time from our busy work lives to attend meetings regarding the proposed LDR amendments because we care. And when we couldn't attend meetings -- we watched and listened closely to the online recorded meetings of LDR presentations given by Ms. Abernethy to City Council in an effort to better understand the proposed changes and updates. We did our best to remain objective when hearing feedback voiced by City Council members. But one point repeated by Ms. Abernethy and council member Gerdes deeply disturbed us – *“that eventually the newly constructed big box, oversized houses – (the ones neighbors so strongly reacted and objected to) -- seem to blend in after construction is completed and the property is landscaped and people just get used to them”*.

We can tell you from firsthand experience (and many of our neighbors can too), that we have never gotten *“used to them”*. Every day when we look out our back windows we are treated to the unsightly view of two oversized, “big boxy”, cheaply constructed buildings that are vastly different in architectural style and scale from anything in the surrounding neighborhood. They say a picture's worth a thousand words, so attached are three photos of those teardown redevelopment projects for your viewing pleasure – (though sadly they don't capture the sheer structural magnitude of scale within the context of the surrounding older existing homes). An old 1920's house located at 832 Bay St NE was torn down and replaced with a very strange 3-story English Tudor structure completed in 2009, and at 201 9<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, a 1,320 sq. ft. single family ranch (purchased by the developer for \$259K) was torn down and replaced with a 3,539 sq. ft. bunker type Alamo structure (completed and promptly sold for \$1,240,000 in 2016). These horrendous and out of character commercial looking structures, remind us every day, how significantly our neighborhood is changing. Approved by the City redevelopment projects like these, negatively impact our quality of life and the character of the Old Northeast neighborhood in a very real and adverse way. And after many years, the 2009 structure (by the way - currently still on the market), has still not *“blended in”*.

The problem continues well beyond our backyard. On daily walks with neighbors we continually see residential redevelopment projects that -- even after construction is completed, do not "*blend in*". The demolished CASA residence on two single family lots which was replaced by eight very large town homes crammed into 426 11th Ave NE. has also not "*blended in*". With an astoundingly permitted F.A.R. -- how possibly could it? Aside from there being practically no green space left to landscape and help mitigate the "out of character" appearance, the sheer scale of the mammoth redevelopment project with massive roofline runoff, has only exacerbated the flooding problem in the area of long standing neighbors. And try driving down the brick paved street of 11th Ave. NE today. The old original roadway is now riddled with deep potholes created by the heavy construction equipment that by the way, disrupted the neighborhood for over a year. Did the developer (who lined his pockets with the project winnings) pay to fix it? No, we the taxpaying citizens and neighbors negatively impacted by the project no doubt will.

As much as we'd like to say we agree with Ms. Abernethy and council member Gerdes when they say that "*eventually these oversized houses blend in*" and that people "*get used to them*", that is far from the truth. Glossing over this important point is a disservice to our community - so please don't rewrite history and please STOP saying it. The oversized boxy houses are permanently here to stay until effective changes are implemented by the city to stop this most upsetting problem. Many communities throughout the US facing similar problems have effectively come up with solutions. Building moratoriums are sometimes even implemented that allow for careful thought, time and fair consideration to all effected individuals involved.

We appreciate and understand the need for redevelopment particularly in the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA). It makes sense to develop areas where there are 1,100 vacant lots available to build homes on. Council member Nurse stated that the average price of a newly a constructed home in the city today is \$500,000, that not enough much needed middle class housing is being built. Why not encourage building more middle class housing in areas where more land is available and incentivize it while at the same time protecting the rights of residents living in the remaining historic neighborhoods where redevelopment is creating such a problem? And yes, we do understand legal property rights ramifications, but under referenced city code 16.20.010.2. - Purpose and Intent the city code states: The purpose of the NT district regulations is **to protect the traditional single-family character of these neighborhoods, while permitting rehabilitation, improvement and redevelopment in a manner that is consistent with the scale of the neighborhood**. Since when did it become ethically fair to allow developers to negatively alter the traditional and unique character of a neighborhood, at

the expense of long-term taxpaying citizens and residents? How are we the taxpaying citizens and residents in NT neighborhoods being protected?

At the March 16, 2017 COW meeting Ms. Abernethy stated – *“At the end of the day the way to describe the goal of staff is not to try and unduly limit the market or constrain our property rights, but what we're looking for is implementing a standard to create better design of these homes so that they are more compatible within the surrounding neighborhoods”*. She also stated *“the goal is not to particularly reduce the size of these houses, but to try and make them more compatible”*.

Although the increased size of newly constructed homes may be camouflaged through design bonuses, it does not address the impact oversized redevelopment in historic neighborhoods has on the following less visibly apparent and yet very important points:

1. Increased street parking
2. Increased traffic problems on roadways originally designed for far less traffic
3. Increased strain on an aging infrastructure
4. Environmental issues with regard to decrease in green space
5. Increase in impervious surfaces that increases stormwater drainage problems
6. Increase in flooding from much larger roof runoff
7. Increased noise from emergency vehicles and an increased population

Although less visible from a construction standpoint, these issues will no doubt have far reaching and long term consequences. Redevelopment problems can be dealt with more effectively in neighborhoods that are not as densely populated, but in historic neighborhoods - originally designed for much smaller size homes and populations - they pose a real problem.

What concerns us most about the staff recommended high 0.50 FAR is that **with** the design bonuses -- the intended goals for implementing an effective FAR method, **will not** accomplish the intended goal of making homes more compatible within surrounding neighborhoods. With all due respect -- it concerned us when Ms. Abernethy explained how they arrived at the recommended 0.50 FAR. *“The staff started with an average that was just slightly higher than the 2016 average and went out in the field and tested those houses to see if they looked too big in the neighborhood and when they went out in the field, they found that the majority of the houses looked fine”* – although Ms. Abernethy readily admits *“that is somewhat of a subjective measure”*, she went on to say it *“feels the newly constructed homes did fit into the character of the neighborhood”*. We see this subjective interpretation and lack of definitive criteria as a real problem.

We applaud those developers who take the time to thoughtfully and responsibly consider the surrounding neighborhoods when designing new homes. And yes, thankfully there are good examples of this throughout the Old Northeast. We also very much appreciate those homeowners who restore and continually maintain their old and beautiful homes.

As a suggestion, it would be helpful for future slide presentations if streetscape composite visuals or possibly video clips were provided to give viewers a better understanding of how newly constructed redevelopment fits within the context of other surrounding homes. Unfortunately, most of the slides presented did not show this and therefore an opportunity to fully understand the true scale of many redevelopment projects, was missed and not made clear. For example, the slides provided of three recently constructed large homes in the 700 block of 16<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE (where a large 1920s bungalow was demolished), showed only the narrow front façade. Knowing firsthand the deep scale and how each of the three houses almost cover the entire lot, was in our opinion not an accurate depiction for clarity and illustrative purposes. If we could be of service in the future to collect composite photos that do this, we would be happy to assist staff.

What are the reasons for the ongoing problem of oversized big and boxy redevelopment that continues to plague our neighborhoods? Is it the increased tax revenue generated? Is it to avoid litigation by greedy developers? If the problem continues, what choices will we the long standing residents have left? Do we continue spending valuable time voicing our concerns in letters, emails and at hearings, while variance requests continually are granted in hopes that one day things will change? Or do we eventually give up, move away (like many of our neighbors), and let developers have their way?

In closing we want to extend our gratitude to Ms. Abernethy and staff who clearly worked very hard on the proposed LDR amendments in an effort to come up with a solution to the multi-layered pressing problem of redevelopment within the City. It is a delicate balancing act indeed, but the point is to get it right, to provide clarity and guidance that will work effectively for years to come. We urge you to support a base FAR of 0.35, with small, targeted enhancement bonuses of no more than 0.1 to help neighbors and developers build and design projects that are more compatible with the character of our existing neighborhoods. Please vote to support this.

Thank you for your time, consideration and service to our city.

Sincerely,  
Mary Dowd and Michael Myers