

GREG JOHNSON | 5539 WATERMAN BOULEVARD, 3S SAINT LOUIS MO 63112

To: Andrea Gutierrez, Mary Hart Burton, and the Board of Adjustment

I'm writing to offer my support for the proposed five-story apartment building at 5612 Waterman Blvd. and Clara Avenue. My name is Greg Johnson and I'm a member of the Waterman Condo Association, part of the Waterman Neighborhood Association. I own and reside on the same block as the proposed building. I have lived in DeBaliviere Place since 1997. I wrote for many years for the urbanist blog NextStl.com.

I wholeheartedly support the plan for the following reasons:

1. DeBaliviere Place was designed to be a dense mixed-use urban neighborhood. Young people move here because of that density and the vibrant urban life it fosters. You have twenty homeless women living in the winter shelter a couple blocks up Clara. You have elderly residents in Section 8 housing on Pershing. You have public housing on Kingsbury. You have million dollar mansions along Washington and Kingsbury. You have condos along Clara and Waterman and market rate apartments along Pershing. Adding more students to the mix will increase this generational and socio-economic diversity.
2. The proposed building site has been vacant for decades, with multiple proposed developments falling through. The site has no alley access and is upon a hill that will require extensive excavation, which makes it difficult to provide parking and access. The site has tended to collect litter and can feel unsafe after dark. The block will feel much safer with added eyes on the street and this neglected, vacant lot replaced by a secured building.
3. This site is serviced by the Wash U Shuttle and by Metrolink as well as busses. According to the U.S. Census only about 80% of neighborhood residents own a motor vehicle. Parking has never been a problem on my block. I have an unused parking spot on our gated lot out back, but I always park on the street because there are always ample spots on the street out front. This proposed development will not significantly impact the ability of us current residents to find a place to park.
4. We still have gaps in our urban street wall. We have made progress in recent years filling in these "empty teeth." But our property values will only go up with new market rate apartments filling in this remaining gap on my block.
5. The buildings along this block of Waterman range from two to six stories, so the proposed structure will fit with our surrounding urban streetscape. A block north, the building at 501 Clara is eight stories.

6. Added residents will help fill restaurants and coffee shops and contribute to the vibrancy of our neighborhood. Our neighborhood retail spaces have struggled to attract and retain businesses. The commercial spaces at Pershing and Belt remain vacant. Additional street level retail space is under construction at DeBaliviere and Pershing. Added residents will support the mixed-use aspects of the neighborhood.

Please do not let a handful of people tell you they speak for the 300 condo residents in the neighborhood. While I respect them and their point of view, they speak for themselves. They have been asking all of us to paste a form letter to present to you objecting to concerns like light pollution, storm water runoff, street cleaning, air quality and the impact on local wildlife. I can assure you that the squirrels will not be inconvenienced by this project. The city has been doing a fantastic job on city services along Waterman. People don't move to DeBaliviere Place to escape from light pollution. If you get fewer than 300 of their form letters, please realize it may be because many of us are unconvinced by their argument from air quality. Densely built urban neighborhoods are actually much better for the environment than the relative sprawl of less dense neighborhoods.

I chose to write my own letter because I moved into this neighborhood in order to live in a dense, vibrant and diverse urban neighborhood. I believe your support for this project is the last best hope for a lot that has been vacant a very, very long time. Please support those of us seeking to make our DeBaliviere Place more diverse, more urban and more vibrant.

Thank you for your consideration,

Greg Johnson  
Owner and resident  
5539 Waterman Blvd, 3S