



May 12, 2014

Kirkland City Council  
123 Fifth Avenue  
Kirkland, WA 98033

Re: MRM Private Amendment Request (PAR)

Dear Council Members:

As you will remember, the MRM Private Amendment Request (PAR) includes two separate proposals. The first is to increase allowed height on our property to eight stories, from the currently allowed five. The second is to add residential as an allowed primary use, in addition to the currently allowed office, on the property.

We have been eager to have the PAR reviewed and approved, and appreciate the Council's inclusion of the PAR in the City's planning work program.

Over the last few months, however, it has become clear that the changed circumstances at Parkplace have made it difficult, if not impossible, for the City to accurately assess the merits of the PAR on our site. The Parkplace project as approved includes 1.2 million sf of office. Our PAR's proposal for housing would provide residential opportunities for those office workers. Moreover, the scale of the Parkplace buildings would be consistent with the scale of building proposed by our PAR.

Not knowing, however, what combination of uses and what density of development will be proposed in any revised Parkplace proposal, has made it become clear that our PAR needs to be reviewed and evaluated contextually, as part of the larger Comprehensive Plan review process, and in light of the anticipated proposed revisions to the Parkplace proposal.

It is for this reason that we have asked that the PAR be folded into the City's Comprehensive Plan process. This will allow the PAR to be evaluated along with other CBD properties, including Parkplace, and as part of the civic conversation about the future of downtown and the role of housing in that future.

We ask the Council, then, to adopt the recommendation of the Planning Commission and the City's planning staff, to defer a decision on the PAR, and to fold the PAR into the City's Comprehensive Plan process.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Razore", followed by a horizontal line.

Joe Razore

MRM Capital, LLC

May 7, 2014

Dear Planning Commission members,

Even though I was unable to attend the last Planning Commission meeting, I was able to listen to it online.

I felt the MRM PAR should have been denied if we are still waiting for City Council to approve or reject it until after the new Comprehensive Plan comes out since it was a PAR in relationship to the old Comprehensive Plan. Is it possible that the new Compressive Plan will still only allow 3 to 5 story buildings along Kirkland Ave? That would be my choice since Kirkland Way/Kirkland Ave is the best pedestrian friendly street when walking to Kirkland from the east or south. The Central/ 85<sup>th</sup> corridor is much more car oriented since it is the only one that meets up with Market. Tall buildings are one of the things people in Kirkland hate the most about Bellevue and said so at many public meetings. I know this because I sat through quite a few Planning and DRB meetings related to the Park Place project. I don't remember seeing very many of you there.

As I've mentioned in the past, I don't like walking past a five story building when I'm in Bellevue or Redmond because the building blocks the sky and often doesn't have retail that I want to patronize. It is worse when there are tall buildings on both sides because I feel like I'm in a canyon. The tallest buildings in Redmond, especially along Cleveland Street, make the area seem even less friendly. It is hard to have a landscaping buffer when buildings are right up against the sidewalk.

Before making a final decision I think the members of the Planning Commission should walk all over Redmond on a gloomy day and see how it feels to walk next to a tall building. It is a lot different that walking next to a two story building. They should also check out the retail in those buildings and think about whether or not the businesses are ones that they personally would patronize. If so, they should also think about where they would park to shop at those businesses. The problem with limited street parking is that no one wants you to park in their lot while shopping at businesses in the next block. You either have to move your car from garage to garage or else leave your car in one lot and take up a parking space that a business needs to have available for the next customer. Usually a business posts a big sign stating that it is illegal to park in their lot when you aren't shopping there. This is even true at Park Place and yet people ignore it and park there to visit the park or performance center. Maybe you are one of them. When public parking or on-street parking is nonexistent or has a time limit a person can't park in one spot and run all their errands on foot. For example, if I go to Zeek's Pizza on Cleveland Street in Redmond for dinner, they don't want me to leave my car in their garage when I have to walk over to Ben Franklin to shop afterwards. Someone else coming for dinner will need to park there. In the evening, apartment dwellers use the parking spaces on the street because they don't want to pay a monthly fee to park in the garage that their building provides.

I want you to imagine what Kirkland Ave will be like if MRM builds an 8 story building and puts a Trader Joes or a Whole Foods store on the ground floor as the owner has suggested. Have you ever driven to a Whole Foods or Trader Joes before a holiday? I can't imagine what it would be like walking along Kirkland Avenue with cars queuing up to get in and out of the garage. Right now, Microsoft has twice as many employees at the old hardware building than they have parking spaces. Many of the full time on-street parking spaces in the area are used by employees of Microsoft and other businesses in downtown Kirkland. That means most of the public parking for other citizens has a time limit of 2 to 4 hours. Microsoft does provide bus passes and shuttles but these services are useless for employees that have

to pick children up at school or from daycare. We also see a decrease in public transportation services which means that it is impossible for many people to get from home to work by any other means than driving in their car. Even if you require companies to have a transportation plan it doesn't mean that employees will abide by it. I didn't read the whole EIS but I can imagine that a building of 8 stories is going to have a much bigger impact on Kirkland than one of 4 or 5 stories especially if it includes a store as well as offices.

I felt all along that the Park Place project was way too ambitious and not in scale with the downtown area. Kirklanders were very upset about the increase in height that was allowed in that PAR. Even if the developer of the MRM site chooses not to put in retail because of a five story height limit, I feel the Planning Commission should still reject the PAR and not allow the developer to have the increase in building height that he is asking for. More retail establishments in Kirkland would be nice but not necessarily successful especially if traffic increases making it hard to get in and out of the downtown area. Costco is just up the street after all and it has a huge parking lot, a pharmacy and a gas station. It is only 1.4 miles to walk from Park Place to Costco. And only takes 11 minutes by bus. Compare that to downtown Redmond where it is a mile to walk from Claim Jumpers to Bella Bottega Cinema. That is only a small portion of Redmond. Most downtown areas of a city the size of Kirkland can easily mean a 1 to 2 mile walk from place to place. How much density do we really need between a freeway and a lake when you only have 4 arterials that come into the town? The public attended the Park Place meetings were assured that no buildings over 5 stories would ever be allowed in downtown Kirkland again. It was a one-off exception in exchanged for total ground floor retail throughout the project. With that much retail already planned in CBD 5, retail on the MRM property is not essential. Think about that before you approve the PAR for the MRM property.

Sincerely,

Margaret Bull  
6225 108<sup>th</sup> Place NE  
Kirkland WA 98033

Councillors:

It has taken three years for the MRM rezone to proceed to its current unsatisfactory status at the Planning Commission. In the six years since the Bank of America imbroglio, no other developer has broken ground anywhere in the CBD except for two small buildings northeast of the Park, and those only within the last few months.

Development in Central Kirkland is stalled out.

Meanwhile, development continues apace on Sixth Street. Google broke ground six months after announcing their expansion. There are several other residential developments underway or completed south of downtown and in Houghton. So less regulated areas in Central Kirkland are succeeding. At the same time, downtown Redmond is being transformed, and whole new neighborhoods are forming in the Bed-Red corridor. Redmond and Bellevue are building sustainable, walk-able, mixed-use neighborhoods with a variety of uses; everything we say we want, but are not executing on.

The message from the market is clear. The heart of our city is a no-go area for new development. The development process is too hard, too slow, and your parking and height rules make it marginally economic at best even if approvals are granted.

So development gets pushed to the fringes, and Kirkland becomes a doughnut with a core of shabby buildings and vacant lots. We continue to maintain an empty lot in the heart of our city at Lake and Central. The antique mall has been closed for eight years with no change in sight. Central Way and the south side of Kirkland Ave are increasingly run-down with no developer interest. We want a successful Park Lane retail area, but the eastern half of the lane is an embarrassment.

We've allowed the traffic and parking obsessions of those who don't actually live in downtown to override the interests of downtown residents and business in building a more vibrant community. (That, and one neighborhood business more concerned with private view corridors than the success of the neighborhood).

The proposed development at MRM offers high-quality retail, improved public spaces and pedestrian experiences, and homes for hundreds of new Kirkland residents. It'll bring a large enough retail space to host an anchor tenant that can support its neighbors. It's an enormous upgrade to the neighborhood. The alternative is a soon-to-be-empty office space and an ugly surface parking lot. Today's MRM site isn't even a safe place to walk across; the public driveway is a helter-skelter exit for drivers from QFC. We should be welcoming this proposal warmly even as we carefully review the details.

Several members of the Planning Commission were comfortable keeping this location 'land-banked' for future commercial use, many years in the future if necessary. I'd love to see commercial use here too if I thought it were remotely likely (but it's failing the market test next door). Realizing that commercial development isn't in the pipeline, the lack of urgency about improving the quality of

life in downtown is disappointing. You can't have a pedestrian-friendly city where residents are confronted with parking lots and 'land-banked' vacant buildings. A constructive approach would realize the urgency of redeveloping this site and work with the owners to shape the best possible plan.

MRM has asked that consideration of its zoning be deferred to the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission has been unwilling to consider MRM's proposal without invoking the uncertainty around Park Place as a rationale for inaction. For that reason alone, MRM's request should be granted.

But please consider how to use the May 20 meeting to send a message that Kirkland intends the CBD to be successful. Council should affirmatively signal that it wants a successful redevelopment (and soon) of the MRM site and the other gaps in the downtown. A prompt and constructive response to the next Park Place proposal is also critical.

Thank you.

Dan Ryan

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