K&B on Magazine St.

Many Feel That The Placement Of This Store Along Magazine St. Is A Little Like Planting A Large Oak Tree In A Bonsai Garden

Four years ago, as a result of the rapidly increasing pressure of developers to maximize profits by overbuilding in neighborhood business districts, several inner city neighborhoods, with the help of Mr. Singleton, Councilman for District B, initiated a study which resulted in the establishment of a new zoning category designated “Bla”. The purpose of this new category was to provide primarily for convenient retail uses, selected personal uses..., to serve the needs of surrounding residential areas” and to “encourage compatibility with adjacent or nearby land uses and the general character of the area”. (City Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance): The key to the new zoning was a restriction to 5000 square feet of area which, it was felt, would discourage demolition of small scale buildings and encourage neighborhood uses such as small retail shops and services for nearby residents.

The ordinance was adopted in November of 1982 and shortly afterwards the first such district was designated in the section of Magazine running from Washington to Louisiana Ave. This section of the Magazine business strip bisects two important historic neighborhoods, both of which are on the National Register, The Irish Channel and the Garden District. However, the ordinance also provided that in certain “unique” cases which would especially “benefit” the neighborhoods affected, application could be made under a “Conditional Use” for a building in excess of the 5000 square foot limit. It was assumed by those who were seeking to preserve the character of the neighborhood areas that such applications would be limited by the restrictive criteria of the law and would be approved only where some “unique” situation existed such as a large building or vacant land being redeveloped for an unusual, beneficial use.

As this article goes to press, the City Planning Department staff is considering a request by the K & B drugstore chain to be allowed to demolish five 19th century buildings near the corner of Magazine and Washington Ave, replacing them with a “full service” store of 14,300 sq. ft. (including the service area on the second floor). In addition, their plan includes surface parking for over sixty cars which is twice as big as the lot serving their store at Louisiana and St. Charles and is an idicia of the traffic expected to be serviced at this new outlet.

The City Planning staff has not yet taken a position, but is expected to do so within the next few days. The City Planning Commission will then review the staff recommendations and take into account the public hearing which was held on Jan. 2 and other citizen input. The PRC, the Garden District and the Irish Channel boards have all registered objections to the K & B proposal, as well as spokesman for several other neighborhood associations and some twenty citizens who spoke at the meeting. The Commission is expected to render its decision at its meeting on January 23rd. This decision, which is in the form of a recommendation, will be forwarded to the City Council for action. The Council is not bound by that recommendation, but makes its own final decision on the application.

The “Bla” zoning was established to add further protections to residential owners in historic, inner city neighborhoods, with the specific intent of maintaining that delicate balance which creates the unique fabric of our inner city. As this is the first challenge to the limitations of the new protective zoning, it is imperative that interested neighborhoods and property owners make their concerns known to their Councilman, by letter as well as appearance at the Public Hearing which will be scheduled before the Council in the near future. The stability of property values of all those areas which include small business strips depends upon a constant vigilance against encroachment of commercial interest into the residential areas, not only in resisting “spot Zoning” (which this petition requests) but also in insisting on the subtle, but essential, neighborhood character of any proposed project.