



*Working to protect the Mississippi River
and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.*

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Dear BIZH committee members:

We are writing to share our comments on the proposed development at 2025 West River Road (the Broadway Pizza site). Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is not one of the appellants for this project and we don't share all of the appellants' concerns—but we do have concerns about the project's height and minimal commercial space. We'd like to offer our perspective.

For over 23 years, FMR has taken a particular interest in the Above the Falls region of North and Northeast Minneapolis. Redevelopments such as this one will set the tone for the decades of future development we anticipate as the Northside riverfront transitions away from industrial uses. We hope that the riverfront will welcome and reflect existing North Minneapolis residents, serving as an extension of the Northside rather than of the North Loop.

Design standards disregarded

FMR is a pro-density organization. We believe that dense development is appropriate in many areas of the city and is crucial to fighting climate change. We support the Minneapolis 2040 plan.

But while density is important, it should not be the sole consideration when evaluating a proposed development project. The Mississippi riverfront is a special asset. It comprises such a tiny percentage of our city's land that it deserves special design consideration. Managing building heights is one aspect of that. Well-managed building heights tier buildings away from the river. This creates more visibility between the neighborhood and the riverfront and promotes additional river-oriented development by making it possible for buildings further back to enjoy views to the river.

This proposed project, at 83 feet, is over twice the height limit set for this site. This height limit is not an old holdover from prior times. It is being actively affirmed in current plans and policies. In fact, the forthcoming Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) ordinance height limit of 42 feet for this site is already being completely disregarded if this project moves forward as-is. The existing Shoreland Overlay height limit of 35 feet for the eastern portion of this property is also being reaffirmed right now through the Built Form regulation process.

Height limits are intended to help create an entire river-oriented neighborhood; to disregard them at the first opportunity is short-sighted and sets a poor precedent. We question whether this level of disregard would be allowed in other areas of Minneapolis' riverfront.

This project does include some positive river-oriented elements including balconies and river-facing green space and resident amenity space.

Lack of community benefits and commercial activity

The other aspects of this proposed development are not strong enough to overcome its shortcomings.

We appreciate the inclusion of 3- and 4-bedroom units; they respond to a regional shortage for larger apartments. But the rent pricing, while meeting the regional bar for “affordable” (at 60% AMI) doesn’t meet the affordability needs of many current Northsiders. The rental prices will be above the current market rate for the neighborhood. We believe that all neighborhoods should include deeply affordable housing and that residents of all income levels deserve access to riverfront living. We recognize that the developer is seeking some MPHA vouchers to provide some units affordable at lower income levels, but unless those are secured none of the housing will be deeply affordable.

Community members have asked that more commercial space be included in the development. This site sits at a major intersection that’s an important gateway to North Minneapolis and to the Mississippi riverfront. It’s a midpoint between existing commercial nodes along Broadway Avenue on both sides of the river and could serve as a connection between those. City plans for this area consistently note the desirability of mixed-use development and commercial activity.

The loss of Broadway Pizza as a rare sit-down restaurant in the neighborhood is acutely felt. While a building owner can’t be forced to rent to a specific type of tenant, in the project’s current iteration a sit-down restaurant or other similar public-serving business will never even be an option here for decades to come. This building will stand for many years, surrounded by increasing levels of residential redevelopment—will we lament the lack of commercial amenities at this gateway location?

Another potential mitigation strategy for the building’s height would be to require bird-safe glass. FMR hopes to see all new riverfront construction meet bird-safe building standards (we are advocating for this to be added to the city’s forthcoming MRCCA ordinance).

Concerning precedent

This redevelopment site offers an opportunity for the city to set a high bar for North Minneapolis development, particularly at prominent gateway sites such as this. Yet the proposed project egregiously violates the city’s brand-new design standards and lacks the commercial activity residents have sought.

If the city lets this opportunity pass, *when are we going to start holding a higher standard for the North Minneapolis riverfront?* When, if not now, will we begin developing the riverfront in a way that supports vibrant neighborhoods, walkability, and economic vitality?

Again, Friends of the Mississippi River supports dense development. But this project sets a poor precedent and shortchanges the North Minneapolis riverfront from high-quality river-oriented design. Thank you.

For the river,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colleen O'Connor Toberman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Colleen O'Connor Toberman
River Corridor Director