

From: Ed Kettle

Sent: Friday, February 23, 2024 2:50 PM

To: Mayor <mayor@grand-rapids.mi.us>; O'Connor, Jon <joconnor@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Robbins, Drew <drobbins@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Ysasi, Milinda <mysasi@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Knight, Lisa <lknight@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Moody, Nathaniel <nmoody@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Perdue, Kelsey <kperdue@grand-rapids.mi.us>; City Manager <manager@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Hondorp, Joel <jhondorp@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: From Ed Kettle

Mayor and Commissioners,

You are in the midst of considering the new master plan for GR. I am aware of the time and effort that has gone into this proposal and respect the work and the people involved. There are questions that deserve some thought though.

The code enhancements made in 2009 amplified the standard regulation under the then Single Family designation to allow “not more than four unrelated people,” in any one home. That item was traditionally allowed by variance. Now however it is standard practice. I, and others, believe this has had a deleterious effect on our community.

As it stands now many of the single family homes in Grand Rapids are being converted to rental properties. Landlords and buying groups are snapping up these properties, altering the floor plans to create a fourth bedroom and then charging as much as \$700 per room. That is by anyone’s definition a “cash cow.” The result is that there are fewer single family homes in what are traditional neighborhoods. I don’t know how widespread this is but I believe it is a growing problem.

As I write this note you are also embroiled in issues of affordable housing. Housing values in Grand Rapids have been skewed by this change. Homes in the areas most affected are no longer valued at the actual value of the home and property, they are now also valued by the potential cash flow that could be created by creating the fourth bedroom and renting it out. First time and lower income home buyers are frozen out by this false inflation. This isn’t limited to inner city areas. Homes are being converted in the higher income sections of GR too.

One painful indicator is the fact that our school system is now handed the task of managing their own decline. With fewer school age kids, typically found in areas of affordable family housing in traditional neighborhoods, the school system’s natural income via per student funding is in serious decline. I wonder if any of you can name a successful city with a diminished school system.

Families are, or will be, driven out of the city for suburban living and shiny new schools. Anyone can see that these families are better suited to afford suburban homes. This only extends the long battle of maintaining families to maintain social and cultural balance in our school system. The result is and will be that Grand Rapids Public Schools remain responsible for low income students. Factual data will demonstrate that these kids require extra attention and costs.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect is that for many years, those of us from the original days of neighborhood associations, worked tirelessly on creating home ownership for low income and minority groups. Home ownership is one of the most proven ways to build personal wealth, providing parents something to use for late in life needs or to simply leave to their families. It seems to me that those opportunities are gone or at least fading quickly.

So you see, I am confused. This new code plan is upfront and might make sense to you who have all of the information. But it leaves many of us hanging. I've heard that there is a sizable pent up desire for places to live in GR. Question: Who? Who are these people pining to live in GR? Will they be able to provide the kind of social balance we've worked hard to create, or will they simply be renters needing a temporary place to live before moving on. Will they enhance our educational system with children or will they be empty nesters?

I'm asking that you slow your approval process until these types of issues can be explained and clarified. I'm guessing only those people involved with this work are fully aware of what is going on. You owe it to the citizens to make sure this change will be done in the brightest light possible for all to see. I'm not above considering I may be all wrong about this. I just don't think I am.

Sincerely,

Ed Kettle
First Ward resident.