



Office of the Common Council

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Dear Greenbush Neighbors:

I am writing to you regarding Porchlight's proposal to acquire a building in the 1000 block of Vilas Avenue. This is a complex issue with many implications for individual neighbors and families, the Greenbush community, and the City of Madison. I appreciate the many thoughtful notes from neighbors that I have received expressing a wide range of perspectives.

I want to let you know that I have not yet come to any conclusion as to whether I will support or oppose this proposal as your alderperson. As your alder, my first job is to ensure an open, factual, and fair-minded discussion of Porchlight's proposal.

However, please do not take that to mean that I am dodging this issue or operating with a hidden agenda.

My direct accountability to you is an obligation that I take very seriously and I will clearly communicate with neighbors once I have arrived at a conclusion.

Most importantly, I want to make you aware that I will be holding a second neighborhood meeting on Wednesday, March 4th at 6:00 pm at Trinity United Methodist Church on Vilas Avenue. Porchlight will re-present their proposal and neighbors are encouraged to ask questions and share their thoughts. I will also have representatives from the Madison Police Department and Zoning Department on-hand to answer any questions.

I have sent out 1,388 postcards to neighbors letting people know about this meeting as I did for the first one I held on January 26th. These postcards should be received within the next few days. I would ask that people contact me directly with your name and address if you would like me to double-check to ensure that a postcard was mailed to you.

I hope all neighbors with an interest in this issue will be able to attend the meeting

Second, I want to outline the city process for considering Porchlight's proposal (and any other city business):

1. Introduction to City Council for purposes of referral. There will no public testimony, aldermanic debate, or vote on this issue at this meeting. The likely committee referral will be to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Committee.
2. Discussion at the CDBG Commission. A few things can happen at this committee: referral to another meeting, vote to recommend that City Council approve (with or without conditions), or a vote not in favor of the project. Public testimony is welcome at the committee.

3. The action of the CDBG Commission is returned to the Common Council for a final vote. In our form of city government, the recommendations of committees such as CDBG are generally given great weight by the Council. However, the Council has the final say over all city business and they can recommend to accept, reject, or modify the recommendation(s) of CDBG Commission. The Council can also vote to re-refer the matter back to a committee or to a later City Council date. Public testimony is welcome with a three-minute time limit per speaker. Neighbors can also attend the meeting and register their position without having to speak. The names, addresses, and positions (for or against) of those registering are read into the public record at that meeting.

The date/times, locations, and agendas for these meetings are posted on the city website. I am not yet sure of the dates for these meetings, but will have that information available at our March 4th neighborhood meeting. I will also post it on the neighborhood list serve and send it out to those receiving this email. I have heard that there is a rumor that the issue will be taken up by the CDBG Commission on March 5th, the day after our neighborhood meeting, and want to assure neighbors that this is false.

Similarly, I have also heard a rumor that Porchlight has already acquired the property. Their executive director has personally assured me that this is also false.

Third, I want to clarify that Porchlight has agreed not to house registered sex offenders at this location. If this proposal were to go forward, we would have to determine how that agreement would be documented and enforced.

Fourth, many people are discussing the prospect of re-forming the Greenbush Neighborhood Association, which I fully support.

It is up to neighbors to decide about how to proceed, but have one personal observation to share. It is often expedient to organize around opposition (or support) of a proposal like Porchlight's. However, because there is a wide range of deeply held opinions among neighbors, I would be concerned that having Porchlight's proposal in the middle of a much-needed discussion about re-forming the association could result in a deep schism in the neighborhood.

As several people on the listserv have pointed out, Greenbush faces several important issues and neighbors have many common interests and concerns. It would be my hope that neighbors could organize around those larger interests and concerns. Simply put, sometimes the beginning of things foretells the end, but that is a personal opinion rather than an aldermanic "position."

I am sorry that this has become such a divisive issue in our community and would urge people to contact me directly with questions, comments, and concerns.

Finally, having lived through more than a few highly charged neighborhood disagreements has taught me one important lesson: we may agree or disagree on this issue (or any other), but when the dust settles we are all neighbors.

Julia