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Hyde Parkers sue over McMobil rezoning**Residents seek to block 53rd Street high rise**

CHICAGO, September 25, 2013—An ad hoc group of Hyde Park residents announced today that it has filed suit against the City of Chicago to overturn the recent rezoning of the so-called McMobil site on East 53rd Street in their Chicago neighborhood.

The suit, filed with the Circuit Court of Cook County, Ill., alleges that the city acted in an “arbitrary and capricious” manner in rezoning the site earlier this year to allow for the construction of a 13-story high-rise building there.

The site has been at the center of a neighborhood battle since last winter, when the University of Chicago, which owns the property, and Mesa Development LLP, the university’s development partner, announced plans for a mammoth 155-foot structure on a section of the street surrounded by buildings of one-to-three stories.

Local residents opposed the plan, claiming that the building would be grossly out of scale with its surroundings and have an adverse effect on the area. They cited traffic and parking problems they said it would cause as well as the visual blight the building would bring to the low-rise pedestrian street.

Until last spring the property, which has been occupied for years by a Mobil service station, was zoned for low-rise business use; it had to be rezoned twice in order for construction of the proposed high-rise to proceed. Despite strong neighborhood opposition, the university, the developer and Ald. Will Burns (4th) pressed ahead with the rezoning effort, which passed the Chicago City Council in June.

In their lawsuit, the plaintiffs charge that the magnitude of the rezoning was illegal because it exceeded guidelines established in legal precedent that protect communities from sudden and extreme changes in zoning and land use.

Demolition of the service station is currently under way, though construction of the building has not yet begun. The plaintiffs hope to have the zoning of the site restored to its original classification, which would prevent the high rise from being built as planned.

“We favor the right kind of development,” said Michael Scott, one of the plaintiffs, whose house is around the corner from the site. “This project is grossly out of scale and will degrade the quality of life in the area, and we think the zoning change to allow it is illegal. The university and its agents have selective hearing when it comes to community input: they seem able to hear that we support more density, but go deaf when we clearly state that it must be in scale. They should work with neighborhood residents to develop a plan that makes sense.”

The plaintiffs are working with Citizens for Appropriate Retail and Residential Development (CARRD), a Hyde Park organization that favors real-estate development in keeping with the current and historical character of the neighborhood and which also opposes the McMobil plan. CARRD is accepting donations to help defray the plaintiffs’ legal expenses. Those interested in donating can go to <http://save53rdstreet.org>. CARRD can also be reached at 53carrd@gmail.com or 773-609-9406.

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