

STATEMENT from the Stroudwater Village Association regarding the proposed rezoning of 1945 Congress Street (Elks Club Property), September 2015. stroudwatervillageassociation@gmail.com

This statement should be considered in addition to our prior letters to the Planning Board from January 2015, May 2015 and July 2015.

The Stroudwater Village Association remains opposed to any one-off rezoning of the parcel at 1945 Congress Street, or for that matter any other individual parcel in the neighborhood area, until a comprehensive visioning process for the neighborhood is undertaken.

At the July 2015 workshop regarding this zoning request, those in attendance heard members of the planning board and City staff say that the City does not have time or resources to initiate a visioning process for the neighborhood at this time. As taxpayers, we understand the problems of limited resources and are disappointed that such a process needs to be delayed. We are willing to wait, however, so that we can focus our collaborative work with the City in implementing the Outer Congress Street Phase II improvements scheduled for this year.

However, just as we are being told to wait, the same planning board and City staff are able and willing to muster the time and interest to make one-off zoning changes like the proposed one. Instead of thinking about the big picture and placing a project in its context, the planning board is green-lighting a project that will redraw the big picture. Whether or not this redrawing is the intended consequence of the individual action is irrelevant. The fact remains that this proposed zoning conversion will pave the way for other zoning conversion proposals in the Stroudwater area. At this point there are essentially no rules of engagement or generally understood expectations in place to deal with the proposals that will follow.

In the prior workshop, the planning board seemed to accept the fact that zoning decisions do not imply legal precedent. That offers small consolation since this is not a legal matter. We are not discussing lawbreaking here – we are discussing what we want an area of the city we love to look like in 2, 5, 10, 20 years – coincidentally at the same time that the City is revising the Comprehensive Plan and we are working with our neighbors at the Jetport on their Sustainability Master Plan. These conversations should be coupled, not siloed -- if stakeholders are invited to have such a big picture discussion, who knows what we will learn – perhaps there's an interest in more retail, or arts and entertainment, or different kinds of residential development such as housing for UNUM and/or Jetport employees.

But if we choose not to have that big picture conversation now, and instead let it be redrawn by itself, the opportunity is lost.

To restate, **the Stroudwater Village Association remains opposed to any one-off rezoning of the parcel at 1945 Congress Street, or for that matter any other individual parcel in the neighborhood area, until a comprehensive visioning process for the neighborhood is undertaken.**