

Thomas Gaulkin
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312.351.5345

Attn: Chicago Plan Commission; Laura Flores, Chair

Re: **October 19 hearing on 6521 S. Blackstone Avenue application**

Dear Ms. Flores and members of the Commission,

I write on behalf of myself, the Woodlawn Corner Block Club Alliance, and other long-time residents of the community around 6521 S. Blackstone Avenue, a property being considered for development by DOM Properties at the Commission's October 19 hearing.

This project will directly harm an important and cherished community space on and around the property (see <https://blackstonegarden.org>). The developer's application does not acknowledge the serious complications associated with its plan, nor has it made any effort to engage the community about its impact. I ask you not to approve the project, at the very least until neighbors and owners of the adjacent properties are provided a more meaningful opportunity to engage with the developers and the City to properly address our concerns.

At stake is a highly valued and well-developed outdoor open space enjoyed for the past decade by the whole community. Previously an unattractive nuisance lot used only for fly dumping and worse, it has been improved by residents of the block into a uniquely designed location for both formal and informal park gatherings, children's outdoor play, gardens, and comfort with a picnic area and raised meeting platform under a prominent and well-maintained tree canopy.

This is not vacant land.

The developer claims otherwise in its application. In its response to the first of the Thirteen Purposes of the Lakefront Protection Ordinance, it states the following:

*The project will not adversely impact on the natural resources of the area.
The project calls for the development of a currently vacant privately owned lot.*

This is demonstrably untrue, which anyone would observe immediately upon visiting the property. In addition to the raised meeting platform, the entire parcel features substantial landscaped elements including brick paths, stone benches, a picnic area, planted fruit-bearing trees and extensive vegetable gardens — all of which depend on the existing conditions of the space.

Moreover, the adjacent lots (owned and maintained by residents of the block) form contiguously maintained open spaces, with additional brick and stone paths, garden plots, sitting areas, trees, and other landscaped park elements. Crucially, those properties were purchased as part of the Large Lots Program precisely to preserve and maintain them as recreational open space and gardens — the same eligible uses prioritized under the city's current ChiBlockBuilder program. These lots are also currently at the center of an effort to create a permanent park space on the land parcel, including the formation of a permanent land trust and the purchase of additional adjacent lots.

All of these ongoing uses and efforts of the community will be harmed by the proposed construction.

The footprint of the proposed 14-unit building lands squarely on several cultivated fruit trees, garden plots, and the landscape's main lawn area used frequently by children for casual sports play and other activities. The building's imposing size will diminish practical use of the remaining space for community gatherings; likewise, its 48-foot height will block sunlight essential for growth in the gardens on the remaining lots.

There are other concerns ignored by the developer's application. A central feature of the entire land parcel is a small grove of trees, including a large fruiting mulberry that appears to touch the property line, and may even straddle it. The developer's building plan would seem to indicate that these trees, including the mulberry, would have to be removed. There is no consideration in the application of that, or any related impacts on the continued use of the neighboring properties, including the impact of construction. At the absolute least, it seems incumbent on the Commission to insist that these plans be revisited in consultation with the adjacent lot owners whose property would be affected.

The owners' protection and enhancement of this space with the community has also helped stabilize the block and benefit the properties in the surrounding area. From a safety perspective, the space provides an essential place for the neighborhood's young people to gather and play. (Jackson Park's nearest playgrounds to the east are across a notoriously busy and unsafe street, Stony

Island Avenue; the nearest public playground to the west is more than half a mile away.)

But DOM Properties would also certainly benefit from the preservation of the community's current use of these lots. There are truly vacant lots throughout the immediate area, some of which DOM Properties is itself already developing. (There is also a city-owned lot directly across the street on the west side of Blackstone Avenue, that has the same dimensions and perhaps could substitute for this lot that is causing so much concern.) Why build on the only lots in the area that actively benefit the community? I believe the community would roundly endorse construction of a similar development on any other *actually* unused lot — not to mention that preserving the park and garden space adds benefit for the future residents of the developer's other buildings too! That's a win-win for everyone.

There may be other outcomes that can benefit and satisfy all involved, and our community certainly welcomes the opportunity to pursue them. But that can't happen with the development as it is currently proposed. It will instead cause predictable negative impacts that must be prevented.

More information about the open space and the community's objections is available at the garden's website: <https://blackstonegarden.org>. I urge you to recognize the concerns and needs of all of the residents of the community and reject the application as currently proposed.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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To: CPC
Subject: RE: Hearing on 6521 S Blackstone Avenue

From: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>
Sent: Wednesday, October 18, 2023 4:02 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: Hearing on 6521 S Blackstone Avenue

And then this email below.

From: Candace Vogler <vogue@uchicago.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, October 17, 2023 5:55:48 PM
To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>
Subject: Re: Hearing on 6521 S Blackstone Avenue

[Warning: External email]

Greetings.

Candace Vogler here. The proposed development will have a serious impact on the community garden spaces that we have developed and maintained for more than a decade.

At this writing, much of the fall harvest is in. The space continues to be one of the only safe, comfortable community areas where young people can gather after school and on weekends for conversation and companionship in the area. There is a children's play area, a large picnic table, paths, and some lighting after dark. It has become central to the life of our neighborhood.

As is true for several of my neighbors, I will be at the meeting on Thursday in the hope that you will not just rush an approval through.

Candace Vogler
David B. and Clara E. Stern Professor
Department of Philosophy
University of Chicago