



Friends of the Plaza, Inc.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE CAVES TO THREATS

Kansas City, MO, April 21, 2011. Yesterday's action by the City Council Plans and Zoning Committee was an unfortunate capitulation to those willing to hold our community and its economy hostage to ill-conceived development plans that put the profits of an out-of-town suburban office developer over the interests of this community.

Rezoning this Plaza location from residential to commercial will destroy needed apartments and construct a massive, 140 foot tall, 200,000 square foot office tower generating over 2,300 car trips a day onto two-lane streets and congested intersections. The developer's own traffic study admits the intersections are already at or over capacity and only get worse with this project.

It will loom over the heart of the Plaza and is in clear violation of the decades-old Plaza Plan.

The proposal will also cherry pick 450-600 centrally located parking spaces now open to the public and instead reserve them for the occupants of the office tower, many 24/7, built and made possible by millions in tax increment financing and other tax incentives.

The developer, North Carolina based Highwoods Properties, has divested itself of nearly all of its retail and residential properties in Kansas City in favor of office buildings. Its proposal would radically alter the vintage central core of the historic Country Club Plaza – one of Kansas City's premier shopping centers and tourist attractions – in order to house a large local law firm, Polsinelli Shughart. So large an office tower – replacing a razed Neptune Apartments – would radically alter the delicate retail-residential-office mix that is the key to the Plaza's 85-year success, weathering the Great Depression and a dozen recessions.

Councilman John Sharp – the lone vote to protect the Plaza – cited the dire consequences of disrupting that balance. The experience of his own Sixth District has shown the fragility of such shopping areas – and that Kansas City should not risk destabilizing the Plaza.

The Committee's action was taken amid threats – largely unfounded – that the law firm might move its offices to Kansas – rather than only one block away from the proposed location – and that it might build a grotesque apartment building on the location if the City refused to agree.

There is no reason that this matter should not be resolved by a reasonable compromise that will allow one of several other appropriate Plaza locations for the Polsinelli Shughart firm. From the beginning, Friends of the Plaza has offered to support other Plaza sites for the project. We have identified several such sites, including those owned by Highwoods.

On the other hand, the Highwoods has been adamant – willing only to address the *appearance* of the office tower, not its inappropriate massive size, height, traffic congestion and lost parking. Having lost the rezoning hearing in the Planning Commission, it is now intent on bullying this proposal through the lame-duck City Council.



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The private citizens who make up Friends of the Plaza are happy to work for compromise – so long as that compromise protects this most important economic and cultural asset of our community. But, for compromise to be possible, the City Council must not give in to corporate bullying.

Make no mistake: We will resist by every legal means – including a referendum campaign to require a public vote – any attempt to force this matter through this lame-duck Council before the new Mayor and Council have the opportunity to fully study the matter and address possible meaningful compromise.

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