TEN FORMER CITY COUNCILMEMBERS
URGE PLAZA OFFICE ZONING REPEAL

Kansas City MO, July 26, 2011. Ten former Kansas City, Missouri City Councilmembers from throughout the City have written the current mayor and city council urging them to repeal a controversial zoning ordinance that would allow a tall office building overlooking the center of the Country Club Plaza.

The City Council’s Planning and Zoning Committee is expected to hold a hearing on August 17, 2011 to consider whether to repeal the ordinance or put it up for a public vote in November as required by a successful referendum petition drive in May and June. The petitioners had over 18,000 signatures when the City Clerk certified in June that they had well over the 7,144 signatures required to force a repeal or referendum vote.

“This office building is far, far too large for a location towering over one and two-story vintage shops below,” said former City Councilman Ken Bacchus. Bacchus chaired the City Council’s Planning and Zoning Committee for eight years from 1991 - 1999. “There are other locations away from the center of the Plaza appropriate for tall office buildings,” he added.

“In addition, it will ‘cherry pick’ 600 prime parking spaces right out of the retail center of the Plaza for all-day office workers. Stores require close, convenient parking for shoppers throughout the day. This project simply ignores that reality,” he continued.

“It’s too much traffic. The developer’s own traffic study admits that the huge project will generate over 2,300 car trips a day that will push Plaza intersections that are already at or over capacity further into failure modes,” said Bonnie Sue Cooper, a Northland City Councilwoman who served on the Planning and Zoning Committee eight years from 1999 – 2007. “Inviting gridlock is bad for the retail shops and surrounding neighborhoods,” she added.

According to former City Councilwoman Katheryn Shields, “The project violates the long-standing Plaza Plan that has successfully guided over $800 million in new development on the Plaza over the last 22 years.”

“We sat down with the J. C. Nichols Company when it owned the Plaza and worked out many development issues, including appropriate locations for tall office buildings on the edge, not the center, of the Plaza. Highwoods bought the Plaza from Nichols with full knowledge of this and has given no reason why it shouldn’t have to follow the same rules as all other Plaza developers,” she concluded.

“Highwoods wants to “bust” the Plaza Plan with this project,” said Aggie Stackhaus, who represented the council district that includes the Plaza from 1995 – 1999. “This isn’t just about the Plaza. It affects all neighborhoods,” she said.
Former Councilman Chuck Eddy, who represented south Kansas City from 1999 - 2007 agreed. “Thousands of citizens have worked with the City over the years to develop neighborhood and area plans like the Plaza Plan. It will be ‘open season’ on all the other neighborhood and area plans if the City ignores the Plaza Plan and lets this project go through,” he said.

“Neighborhood planning is fundamental in Kansas City,” said Mary Williams-Neal, an eight-year veteran of the Planning and Zoning Committee who represented the City’s Third District from 1995 – 2003. “This project simply ignores people’s legitimate expectations,” she added.

All former City Councilmembers who’ve represented the Plaza since 1987 oppose the project – Katheryn Shields, Dan Cofran, Aggie Stackhaus, Jim Rowland and Jim Glover - with the exception of Evert Asjes who has taken no position because of a conflict of interest. Other former City Councilmembers signing the letter include Northlanders Mike Burke and Sally Johnson.

Current City Councilmembers opposing the project include John Sharp, Scott Taylor and Jim Glover, who returned to the City Council after this year’s elections.

Former Councilman Cofran is legal counsel for Friends of the Plaza, the group opposing the project and organizing the petition drive.

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[A copy of the letter is included with this release]