



FOREST PARK SOUTHEAST NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
COMMUNITY LETTER | 1070-1092 S. KINGSHIGHWAY BLVD

July 5, 2022

To City Officials, the Cultural Resources Office, the Board of Adjustment, and the Forest Park Southeast Neighborhood:

Since September of 2021, the Forest Park Southeast Neighborhood Association (FPSENA) has hosted three community engagement meetings for Lux Living's development proposal at 1070 - 1094 S. Kingshighway Blvd. The FPSENA undertook these meetings upon the request of Alderwoman Tina Pihl due to the absence of a neighborhood development committee.

At the time of the initial request to host these meetings, the FPSENA Board sought to host two meetings with the goals of 1) presenting project information to the community, and 2) collecting feedback for the Alderwoman to take back to Lux Living (also referenced herein as "the Developer") to negotiate community-recommended changes to the project.

The Alderwoman requested that the FPSENA host a third meeting in June 2022 for Lux Living to re-present plans to the community prior to them submitting their project for review by the Preservation Board.

At the first meeting in September 2021 we heard from Lux Living Representative Chris Stritzel and Property/Construction Manager Julie Frady. They presented site plans for a 6 story, 144 unit, 144 parking space Form-Based Code Building Development Standard Courtyard Type (presented as "Podium Type") apartment building in "brick" and "metal paneling" with an underground garage accessed from the Arco - Oakland alleyway. After the presentation the meeting transitioned into a question-and-answer session between representatives and the community.

- o More of the presentation and community feedback can be found in the minutes [here](#), video recording [here](#), and audio recording [here](#).
- o Questions that remained [were provided](#) to the Developers via email after the meeting and it was requested they come prepared with answers for the follow-up meeting.

At the second meeting in October 2021 we heard from Lux Living owners Victor Alston and Sidarth Chakraverty, Lux Living Representative Chris Stritzel, Property Manager Julie Frady, Traffic Engineer Julie Nolfo



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of the Lochmueller Group, and their Architect from VE Design Group. We heard many of their responses to the questions coming out of the first meeting, including: Access to the garage from the alley and access to the garage from Kingshighway as being the two viable garage access options; That they'd repair any infrastructure damages caused by construction and only construct during City-sanctioned construction hours; And that they'd incorporate more of the community's desired exterior material changes. However, [renderings they presented were incorrect](#) and it was unclear if and how community feedback was incorporated into this iteration of the project. They did not provide updated renderings to the FPSENA after the meeting.

- o More of the presentation and community feedback can be found in the minutes [here](#), video recording of the presentation and community discussion [here](#), audio recording [here](#), and chat transcript [here](#).
- o The above minutes, the meeting recording, and the community discussion transcript were shared with the Alderwoman in November to work with the Developer on the project.

Days after that meeting, a Lux Living employee requested to meet with the FPSENA Board and Alderwoman Pihl. We heard from this employee that *"[Lux Living] won't be a good fit for the neighborhood and [they] need to be treated the way they treat others - rude and all that. There's a lot of things going on that make them worse than they seem."*

In an email sent prior to the meeting, the employee shared that *"[what was said on NextSTL](#) remains true, but that's just the public side to it. You rarely get to hear about what goes on internally (like what you'll hear a bit of tonight)."*

That night, what we heard from the Lux Living employee included:

- Vic Alston and Sid Chakraverty discussing a strategy to remove bricks from key places on the Kingshighway properties to cause collapse during the winter, and/or a plan to commit arson to get rid of the buildings
- Vic and Sid discussing plans to sue Green Street and other developers in FPSE to slow down their projects (like they did with the Expo development in the Skinker-DeBaliviere neighborhood)
- Lux Living intending to withhold plans from the City and our neighborhood in order to try and demolish the buildings along



Kingshighway, and then forcing the neighborhood to choose between two plans, one which would feature different traffic patterns, but more apartments

In the days after the meeting, we heard from that employee that he “also had [Sid] give me his word to not pull a fast one and rig the buildings to collapse. He promised he wouldn’t and that he wants to do it the way the City rules say since it’s at that point. And as far as fire goes, he says it’s not an option anymore since the risks were just too high. So that’s one of my concerns gone.” He concluded that “I think, at this point, it’s important to let [City officials] know not to let this project advance and I’ll send [them] a note too giving a summary of why these steps need to be taken.”

In Spring 2022, the FPSENA’s Vice President was given the chance to tour Lux Living’s newest building, The Hudson, to speak with tenants, and to review evidence provided by those tenants. The tenants detailed many issues, including but not limited to:

- A pattern of Lux Living lying to tenants and disrespecting their privacy by entering apartments without warning
- Cheap materials used for construction and unsafe/poor labor practices resulting in a less-than-quality building
- The use of non-disclosure agreements to hide reasons why tenants were breaking their leases, in addition to evidence that they incentivize reviews and testimony at public meetings, and aggressively remove negative online reviews

On June 21, 2022, the FPSENA held the third community engagement meeting with Lux Living and its representatives, including owners Vic Alston and Sid Chakraverty, and their architect from VE Designs, Mike Burkhart. They presented plans for a 155 unit, 155 parking space Form-Based Code Building Development Standard “Podium Type” apartment building with more red brick on the facades, entrances and exits into the garage from Kingshighway Blvd, and a relocated pool deck. The FPSENA Board held a question-and-answer session about the project, and then asked all Lux Living representatives to leave the meeting for the community to share their comments on the project openly and candidly with their fellow community members. The Board started the session with a summation of information that had come to light since the previous meeting, then asked to hear from the community.



The video of the presentation can be viewed [here](#), and the start of the community discussion [here](#).

At the end of the community discussion, we asked residents to complete an exercise to indicate whether they support/do not support the proposal, and why or why not. Those responses can be viewed [here](#). We encourage anyone who reads this letter to read through the responses of our residents to get a true feel for this complicated scenario.

The majority of responses indicated a position of “no support.” Reasoning ranged from concerns about the building quality, to the Developer’s reputation, and poor treatment of their tenants.

Residents wrote “the builders that own the company have a history of subpar structures and are known for poor mismanagement.” Another said “Lux Living has a well documented record of poor business practices and shows no interest in working with the community.” Other responses detailed the numerous lies that were told to the community during the engagement meetings, and stated “please consider the input of our residents when determining whether or not to proceed with this development. We do not want Lux and its unethical, dangerous practices in our neighborhood for years to come.”

Other responses supported the project. Those in support cited the need for density, increased housing supply, and praised the design of the building. A resident wrote, “I have yet to see a better site proposal. Site has been empty for 10+ years.” Another wrote that she felt “it was a huge safety issue related to those buildings on Kingshighway.” Those in support made it clear that they thought this proposal was our neighborhood’s best option to get rid of old buildings that create dangerous conditions and to replace them with “an asset to the neighborhood” that generally incorporates modifications from community feedback as it pertains to the Form-Based Code of the neighborhood.

Some responses indicated conditional support, asking “the [Alderwoman] ... to take steps to ensure Lux’s compliance with the commitments they make,” and a need for the City to monitor the construction to make sure it is up to code.

Community members expressed frustration that they were in a position where they had to choose between dilapidated buildings and a developer that has proven to be duplicitous and vindictive. A resident wrote: “I



fear that not allowing them to develop something could be cause for LUX sitting on the land like Drury for many years, and that would be bad. They would likely do as little to sustain the current lots as Drury did.”

What we heard is that these buildings do not hold significance in their current conditions but a residential project of this relative nature can visually improve the immediate area and begin (economically) contributing positively to the neighborhood and the city.

The FPSENA Board also heard that the community has a prevailing distrust of this developer, and will not tolerate any developer whose business operations include conspiring to act with ill intent, acting in bad faith, or behaving negligently. Even if the developer sells the building post-construction, there is understandable apprehension in the community around the durability and longevity of this developer’s buildings.

The FPSENA’s stated mission is to elevate our community’s concerns to elected officials and other government and non-government entities within the City of St. Louis, and to serve as a medium through which neighborhood stakeholders can participate in decision making that affects the life and community of its residents.

We’ve heard from our residents and given their feedback, the FPSENA Board cannot support this project without greater community consensus. If the project moves forward without greater support from the neighborhood, the community asks that the City and its public officials create enforceable protections for tenants and the neighborhood.

Signed,

The Board of The Forest Park Southeast Neighborhood Association

Dan Doelling, President
Michael Browning, Vice President
Rachel Siegert, Treasurer
Aaron Bisch, Secretary
JC Fick, Member-at-Large