

Members of the City Council and Planning Commission,

We are the listing brokers for the Trott Brook North development. We request that you read and consider the information presented in the attached letter that was written in conjunction with some of the Trott Brook North landowners.

We want to thank those of you who voted in favor of allowing flexibility on lot frontage size. This will allow the developer and city staff the flexibility to compromise and collaborate on a creative development. If you voted in opposition to flexibility on lot frontage, then we ask you to reconsider after hearing the landowner's views and concerns.

We have not engaged in dialogue with the Planning Commission or City Council members prior to this point as we wanted to respect the city's process of disseminating factual information and gathering input from residents in the vicinity of our land. However, after monitoring the city meetings and public comment on social media it has become apparent that the landowner's voices need to be heard as well. Unfortunately, the initial resident petition which was the catalyst for much of the opposition had misleading and incorrect information that served to inflame residents and was signed by people other than residents of Ramsey.

Thank you for taking the time to read the attached letter. The family has owned the land since 1914, so you can imagine how difficult hearing this opposition is for the family. It is important to the family that this project be a creative, dynamic and inclusive development. We are confident that under the city council's direction, city staff and the Excelsior Group can come to a compromise to create a marketable development and community space that all residents of Ramsey can enjoy.

We would welcome your feedback. Please reach out to us directly with questions, thoughts and comments.

Thank You,

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ATTN: City Council Members, Planning Commission Members, City Staff

Greetings,

Please allow us to introduce ourselves. Our names are Jake and Jon Packer. We are the listing brokers for the Trott Brook North development. We both have B.S. Degrees in Real Estate Sales & Appraisal, we are both Commercial Real Estate Appraisers, Licensed Assessors, and Realtors. We are also the great, great, grandsons of William Makowsky, who purchased the Trott Brook North Development land back in 1914. We are reaching out to you so that you might better understand this proposed development from the landowner's perspective.

Addressing public feedback concerns:

The main concerns of residents seem to revolve around the overall change in this area from rural to urban. Residents seem concerned about the impact this change will have on wildlife, the natural attributes of the land, and city infrastructure. We feel residents need to understand that the city has been planning for development in this area for over two decades. This land has been slated for city utilities since before the year 2000 and has been zoned R-1 MUSA since 2012. The Comprehensive Plan already accounts for and addresses the needed infrastructure and environmental changes associated with development of this area.

Despite the city's forethought and preparation when creating the Comprehensive Plan, residents are still opposed to the development. Based upon public comment, especially on social media platforms there is a concerted effort to push for maintaining the 80-foot lot requirement. It appears this effort has little to do with lot sizes and more to do with reducing the economic desirability of the land in the hopes that buyers will not find developing financially feasible; ultimately keeping the land undeveloped. We understand that neighboring residents enjoy the beauty of the open space and seeing the wildlife that comes with it. We cannot tell you how happy it has made us to have been able to provide that for the last 106 years. However, at a certain point keeping the land at its current use is no longer economically feasible. We believe it is our right as landowners and your responsibility as a city to utilize the land to its highest and best use. It is unreasonable for residents to try to prevent us from having a marketable and maximally productive property. The Excelsior Group's current proposal keeps overall density well within the limits allowed in the R-1 Zoning District. Their goal is simply to reduce lot frontage on a portion of the development, which will provide buyers with lower lot prices and a more desirable development layout (every 1 foot of street frontage increases hard costs \$600, not including builder mark-ups). Essentially, lot sizes will remain relatively unchanged, but will have smaller side yards and larger backyards giving buyers more variety in their lot. This lot layout has proven time and again to be preferable in the current marketplace and is more aesthetically pleasing and cost effective to the end lot buyer.

Why the city council should support lots sized smaller than 80 feet:

We understand that as elected officials you must weigh resident concerns, landowner rights, and what is best for the city. However, many of these neighboring residents are uneducated in real estate economics and may not understand what is best for the city as a whole. The city council is entrusted to make difficult decisions based on the information at hand. Information and resources from industry experts can provide useful guidance and support for creating a cohesive and marketable development within the city of Ramsey. Below are some resources and supporting points that stress the importance of allowing a mixture of lot frontages.

Comprehensive Plan and 2019 Maxfield Housing Study:

Upon reading these documents it is clear that current market conditions support providing variety in price and lot size. The housing study noted how difficult it is to produce housing at an affordable price point for Ramsey residents. As stated previously, making lots with less road frontage helps to keep lot costs down, making the houses more affordable for the average person. Producing a new home for under \$375,000 is becoming exceedingly difficult in today's market. Offering only 80-foot-wide lots does not provide the variety that consumers need to achieve affordable housing. Providing only 80-foot-wide lots will also dramatically increase the holding time for the developer, which will increase costs for everyone. Lots that remain unsold for longer periods of time can become an unsightly hindrance to the community and do not contribute as much to the tax base. Other current developments in the city have offered varying lot sizes and people who choose to live in the Trott Brook North development should have the same opportunity. In reading the City of Ramsey's vision statement for housing on the 2040 comp plan it is made clear how important it is to build an inclusive community; one that will be affordable and welcoming to residents with varying socioeconomic statuses, housing preferences, and ages.

Planning commission and city staff comments taken from minutes:

Planning Commission Recommendation (taken from the May 7, 2020 meeting minutes): Alternative 2 (Compromise Scenario): "Recommend modifications to Ordinance #20-08 allowing 65 and 80-foot-wide lots on the subject property and recommending the applicant keep 80-foot-wide lots and abutting existing residential homes, while putting smaller 65-foot-wide lots interior to the site to create a natural density transition. Recommend the Applicant modify the sketch plan to remove 55-foot-wide lots. This would keep the entire site zoned low density residential and each lot size would fit within the city's current set of zoning standards. The Planning Commission supported this decision."

Staff recommendation (taken from the May 7, 2020 meeting minutes): "Staff would recommend continuing a conversation about appropriate development in this area and work to see if a compromise can be reached. It is possible that a scenario exists that maintains the same number of lots allowed by code but clusters certain parts of the development to maximize density transition and development creativity."

Flexible lot sizes result in better use of land:

A piece of land this large should be developed with creativity and flexibility to maximize the site's natural characteristics, while protecting wildlife habitat and maximizing buildable land. This can be accomplished by allowing flexibility with lot sizes. Of the proposed 200-acre Trott Brook North development only 123 acres will be used for housing. The remaining 77 acres will remain as wildlife habitat and park space. City staff recently toured the farmstead and were excited about the possibility of incorporating our historic 100-year-old barns in the proposed park plan. We could not think of a better way to preserve the rural character of Ramsey than to restore and preserve these historic barns for all of Ramsey to enjoy! Unfortunately, if a compromise on lot sizes is not reached, it is unlikely that residents will have the opportunity to enjoy this piece of history and park space.

The Excelsior Group as a valued partner:

The Makowsky Family has been trying to sell the Trott Brook North property on and off for the last 18 years. We have been approached by numerous developers who were only interested in purchasing 40 acres and not the full 200 acres. We as landowners care about the final product and are convinced that piecemealing 40-acre developments together would not “flow” and not be as visually appealing as a well thought out master development for the entire 200 acres. We decided to move forward with the Excelsior Group for a variety of reasons:

- They understand the value of the land.
- They are interested in more than just profits. If you look at their portfolio, it is evident that they create neighborhoods that are rich in nature and community.
- The Excelsior Group is well respected in the industry. They are one of the top players in the residential land development space and one of few developers that can and are willing to purchase a parcel of land this large.
- They have the expertise and financial means to develop all 200 acres with a complete master plan.
- They are willing to work with neighbors and city officials to discuss and remedy reasonable concerns.

We encourage you to reach out to Ben Schmidt (contact information is below) at the Excelsior Group, so he may answer any questions you may have about Excelsior’s vision for our land. Ben has urged council and planning members to tour developments where Excelsior has utilized a similar mix of lot sizes. If you have not already, we request that city staff and council members take time to look at Excelsior’s past developments. We are excited to partner with Excelsior to develop one of the last large parcels of land along a valued natural resource, we hope you are as well!

Contact information:

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The Excelsior Group 1660 Highway 100 S, Suite 400 St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Change and Family Background:

There has been a lot of discussion regarding change and how residents surrounding the Trott Brook North Development do not want change. The Makowsky family is no stranger to change. The majority of the proposed Trott Brook North Development (160 acres) is owned by Makowsky Family Farms, which is owned by 4 families, of which are all descendants of William Makowsky. The Makowsky family has been the stewards of this land for the last 106 years.

William purchased the land and homestead back in 1914, before Ramsey was even a city. At its inception the farm was utilized as a dairy farm. Over time, inevitably change came to the dairy business as larger farms and corporations began taking over the industry. This pushed dairy prices down and to help make it through these tough times our great grandfather sold 140 acres in 1972 to develop Golden Eagle Estates, which is directly west, across Variolite from the Trott Brook North Development. This was not a popular decision amongst residents, at the time there were concerns that development “would change the rural feel of Ramsey, bring a crime

element into the area, strain existing infrastructure, and reduce property values.” Fortunately for neighbors none of these fears came to fruition. If the Makowskys had not sold this land to a developer many families, including some of those currently opposed to developing our land would not be living there today. Because of our grandfather's decision, numerous families got to build houses in that development and enjoy the beauty of Ramsey and our family's land across the street.

After the turn of the century the Makowskys had transitioned into raising beef cattle, around that same time the Brookfeild development was started across Trott Brook. Soon after we began receiving complaints about the sounds and smells of an operating cattle farm. We could also no longer hunt along Trott Brook as we had for generations prior. Times were changing and our way of life was no longer acceptable in Ramsey.

Eventually the Makowskys quit farming beef cattle and began trying their hand at corn and soybeans. For those of you unfamiliar with the economics of farming, the income produced from raising corn and soybeans on such a small tract of land would provide the owner with an annual income well below the poverty line, whilst still paying taxes on a large and expensive parcel of land. Farming this tract of land is no longer economically viable and is not possible given the age and physical limitations of the family members. In this modern era the highest and best use of our property is for a housing development. We are simply asking the city to allow us to construct a development that meets the needs of the market, residents, and owners alike.

The smaller northern portion (40 acres) of the proposed development is owned by Jack and Janis Petersen. The Petersons have owned this property since the early 1990's and continue to farm Christmas trees and spruce tops on the land. The Petersons have made Ramsey their home for many years and live just south of Trott Brook.

We understand change is hard, but many times once we get over our fear of change, change is good.

Moving forward:

Thank you for taking the time to hear and understand our views on this topic. We are requesting that city council members continue the conversation with the Excelsior Group to create a marketable development for today's economy.

Please reach out to us with any questions or concerns you may have,

Best Regards,

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