

Mattingly, Gabrielle

From: Barbara Ashley [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, August 20, 2020 2:45 PM
To: Planning
Cc: Barbara Ashley
Subject: Objection to Application Little Friends, Inc. (HPC Meeting 8-27-20)

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August 20, 2020

To the Members of the Naperville Historic Preservation Commission;

Our letter concerns the application before you that petitions for approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness filed by RAM West Capital, LLC for the Little Friends Property at 140 and 126 N. Wright Street, Naperville, IL 60540. We are residents of the Historic District, and live immediately adjacent to this property, where we have been for thirty-five years. We are NOT in favor of approval of this COA as it currently stands.

The redevelopment as it is now proposed puts 47 residential units, three within the Kroehler Mansion and 44 more in twelve new row home buildings, plus one detached garage, on the property. We are strongly opposed to the plans for row homes because this housing does not fit in the midst of a neighborhood of single-family homes. The style, height, and density are drastically out of character with surrounding living structures, will detract from the residential character of the Historic District and will negatively impact the quality of life for those who live in proximity to the development that is being proposed.

How did we get to this point? Ram West has been able to rework their plan so that it includes alleyways, so why couldn't single-family homes with rear-loading garages be built around the restored Mansion and the beautiful park space designed to set off this crown jewel? We believe that it would be a far better fit to build single-family homes that are in keeping with the design of the periods represented within the Historic District rather than a dense block of row homes that fundamentally change the character of the neighborhood.

There are some priorities that any plan for redevelopment must address.

We need a public park to restore what was lost when College Park was removed. College Park has been a fixture of the neighborhood for at least as long as we have lived here since 1979. Its loss has eroded the quality of life for our neighborhood.

We must do everything possible to preserve and protect the legacy oaks and other mature trees on the Little Friends property. Parkway trees must also be preserved. A great many of the oldest trees that have lined our streets have reached the end of their life spans and have been taken down. We cannot take a single one that remains for granted. They are both a hallmark and a beloved part of this area of Naperville.

Infrastructure must be at the forefront of any planning for this block. We have many questions and concerns about drainage and possible flooding onto surrounding streets. Can our water and sewer system support what already exists if many more residences are built? We have some of the oldest water and sewer mains in Naperville. What impact will redevelopment have on the city's ability to provide more electrical power and natural gas in our immediate area?

As residents and homeowners in the Historic District, we accept that there are requirements and restrictions when owning property in the Historic District, and we comply with them in return for the benefits of living within it. Any future purchaser of our property would have the same expectation, as should the purchaser of the Little Friends Property. To the extent that this, or any other, purchaser is granted permission to avoid the compliance with the requirements of the Historic District, then this raises the question of why the other homeowners should be held to a different and more stringent standard. This effectively eviscerates the whole premise upon which the Historic District is based.

Please listen to us and advocate for us, the neighbors of the Historic District, who often feel that their interests are secondary to those of developers. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine this historic property site for present and future residents. It is our one and only chance to get this right. We plead for you to take as much time as is necessary to do that, protecting our unique part of Naperville and ensuring a legacy that we can be proud to leave for future residents.

Sincerely,
Barbara and James Ashley

August 20, 2020

Naperville Historic
Preservation Commission

Dear Commissioners,

Because our home is located in the heart of the Naperville Historic District, we have reviewed with great interest the Certificate of Appropriateness (Application #20/2321) submitted by RAM West Capital, LLC (the “Applicant”) in regards to the zoning variances requested for the proposed “Heritage Place in Historic Naperville” development project (the “Development”).

We understand that maintaining the balance between historic preservation and city evolution is difficult, requiring compromise on the part of developers and preservationists alike. Indeed, it was that need for compromise that led the Naperville City Council to authorize the owner of the property to demolish the Kroehler mansion in order to realize the value of the underlying property. The case before the Historic Preservation Commission today is quite another matter: whether to authorize zoning variances that will allow for an out-of-scale, out-of-character mega-development in the middle of the Historic District that will fundamentally and irrevocably adversely alter its composition. For the reasons set forth below, we urge you to deny Applicant’s Certificate of Appropriateness:

1. The Applicant’s Proposed Preservation of the Kroehler Mansion is a “Trojan Horse”

To state the obvious, there is nothing currently preventing the Applicant from demolishing the Kroehler mansion as allowed by the Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the City of Naperville on November 19, 2019 as COA #19-2840, subdividing the property into appropriately sized single-family detached residences with a minimum 6,000 square foot lot size as required by Section 6-6C of the Naperville Municipal Code (the “Code”) or duplex units with a minimum 4,000 square foot lot size per dwelling unit (i.e., 8,000 square foot lot size for a two-family unit). Each new residence constructed would require a Certificate of Appropriateness to be issued from the Historic Preservation Commission, ensuring that the Commission’s input would be available to protect the character of the Historic District. From the great deal of tear-down activity that has occurred both within the Historic District and around its borders, we believe it is safe to speculate that new construction of residences fitting the character of the neighborhood would generate a high level of market interest. In any event, no evidence has been provided to the Commission by the Applicant that such use of the property is difficult, burdensome or unreasonable.

The Applicant’s real issue is that single-family detached residences that comply with the Code and match the underlying character of the neighborhood would provide only a reasonable return on its investment. And a reasonable return is simply not good enough for the Applicant. Instead, the Applicant

seeks to maximize the return on the asset by employing efficiencies of scale in construction only available for dense, multi-unit projects. In order to accomplish its goal, the Applicant requests zoning variances to convert an entire block within the Historic District into an anachronistic, modern luxury complex.

As an enticement to obtain consent for its project, the Applicant offers up the “saving” of the Kroehler mansion. This is the “Trojan Horse” (or, in the Applicant’s words, “loss leader”) that the Applicant anticipates will be accepted as a *quid pro quo* for approval of the Development. Yet saving the Kroehler mansion at the expense of granting zoning variances that allow for a high-density modern development to be built in the Historic District amounts to nothing more than a Pyrrhic victory for preservation. The battle to save the Kroehler mansion may be won, but the war to save the entire Historic District is lost.¹

The Historic District was originally built by Naperville’s founding citizens, has been protected by act of the Naperville City Council, was recognized as being of national significance through designation by the United States National Park Service and is now maintained in trust for future generations by its homeowners. To allow the Development to proceed amounts to a breach of that trust. We realize that to many residents of the Historic District, the demolition of the Kroehler mansion is a tragedy. But at what price can it be saved? We respectfully submit our strong belief that the entire character of the Historic District matters more than the preservation of a single building.

2. Issues Raised in the Applicant’s Development Petition

Several issues worthy of your consideration are raised in the Applicant’s Development Petition Form filed with the City of Naperville in support of its requested zoning variances. We point to the following:

- **Background of Applicant:** In our personal experience living in the Historic District, we have seen the adverse effects of development projects being abandoned or delayed. For example, DJK Custom Homes, the proposed builder for the Development, was also the initial builder for the new house being constructed at 26 North Sleight Street (two houses north of our home at 16 North Sleight Street). The new home has remained half-finished for nearly a year (our understanding is that DJK and the owner are in litigation). The lack of green space created by the barren lot has caused excess runoff from rain and contributed to flooding in our area this Summer (for the first time since purchasing our home in 2013, we had flooding (three feet) in our basement, necessitating the replacement of our furnace, water heater, washer and dryer).

Thus, we point out that although an entire section of the petition is dedicated to “background,” there is a dearth of information regarding the applicant/developer. RAM West Capital, LLC was formed in December 2019 as an Illinois limited liability company. It is not clear whether it is associated with RAM Real Estate Capital, which is a Nyack, New York-based real estate hedge fund that claims on its website to have “*the expertise, capital and flexibility to structure the right deals for our partners, whether through pari-passu joint ventures or preferred equity structures.*”

Strangely, the Applicant’s registered address and principal place of business are both located at the offices of Rosanova & Whitaker, Ltd., the law firm representing the applicant. Its managers

¹ It is telling that in Mr. Whitaker’s “Business Terms Request Letter” dated May 6, 2020, states that “We respectfully request that the City confirm that individual HPC review will not be required for each building permit.”

are listed as: William Novak, Frank Bednarz and Matthew Buckley, none of whom have a LinkedIn profile associated with RAM Capital or RAM West Capital. On the COA application, the contact information is listed as a private GMail address rather than a corporate web address. As a preliminary matter, we urge you to investigate the background of the Applicant, its business history and sources of financing (including amounts funded as equity, debt, etc.).

- **Property Values:** We question the unsupported statements set forth in the Applicant's request for conditional use to develop the property with single-family attached dwelling units. In particular, at Section 2(b) of its petition, the Applicant writes *"The conditional use will not ... impair property values because the Property will be redeveloped with a less intensive use, which reduce negative impacts to neighbors."* Further on in this section, the Applicant asserts *"The proposed redevelopment of Heritage Place will improve the neighborhood by providing diversity in housing product with new low-maintenance housing that is attractive to both younger and older generations of homebuyers."*

These statements are conclusory in nature, and the Applicant offers no empirical evidence in support of the conclusions drawn. In fact, the statements amount to little more than the opinion of a party with a vested financial interest in ensuring the Development is allowed to proceed.

Our opinion, on the other hand, is that a 47-unit row home community has a very real possibility of diminishing the unique character of the Historic District which may have an adverse effect on real estate prices. We have no doubt the Applicant will get top dollar for its product; that's their job. But the unavoidable consequence of placing modern townhomes in the middle of the Historic District (instead of single-family residences matching the character of the Historic District) is that it will be less unique and arguably less desirable.

- **Lot Area Requirement in the R-2 Zoning District:** At Section 5 of its petition, the Applicant seeks a variance to reduce the required lot area per Section 6-6C-5, which requires 6,000 square feet of lot area for single-family residences, and 4,000 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit for duplexes. As a justification for the reduction in lot area, the Applicant asserts, without citing any support, that:

"The lot area requirement is a measurement of density. Density limitations ensure that public facilities, be it utilities, schools, parks, or roadway infrastructure, are not overwhelmed by the number of people generated from a development. In many communities "density" has been frowned upon as an urban evil to be avoided in the suburbs. Certainly, densities appropriate for urban Chicago locations would not be appropriate for Naperville. At the same time, Naperville is dynamic city where more density is appropriate proximate to downtown, the train station, or other commercial hubs than it is in more remote and strictly single-family settings. Context is critically important in evaluating what type of density is appropriate."

From this statement, the Applicant concludes that the variance should be allowed because it does not violate the Code's requirement that the variance "not alter the essential character of the neighborhood and not be a substantial detriment to adjacent property" because:

“By virtue of reducing the intensity of the use, it must then follow that the variance needed to substantiate the proposed redevelopment will not substantially detriment adjacent property.”

In other words, the Applicant argues that because fewer people will occupy the property during the day, its usage will be less dense, and therefore the Commission can come to no other conclusion that the proposed use does not alter the essential character of the neighborhood.

We disagree for the reasons set forth below:

- Section 6-1-2 of the Code states that the objectives of the zoning code includes to *“establish adequate standards for the provision of light, air and open spaces.”* It would seem to us that, in a residential Historic District, any consideration of density would also have to consider the effect of the construction on light, air and open spaces visible from adjacent properties.
- While it is suffice to say that, in our opinion, the reasoning used by the Applicant is strained at best, there is one thing we can agree with the Applicant on: *“Context is critically important in evaluating what type of density is appropriate.”* In the question before the Commission, the “context” to be examined is whether the high-density and lack of green space created by rows of contiguous, identical townhomes would detract from the unique charm of the Historic District represented by the variety of architectural styles that are reflective of the different time periods during which the homes were built. In our opinion, to any reasonable person the answer is yes.

To conclude, in our view the proposed 47-unit luxury townhome complex is out of character with the Historic District. If built as proposed, it would irrevocably damage the integrity of the Historic District. Accordingly, we strongly urge you to oppose the requested Certificate of Appropriateness and insist on a less dense development that fits the needs and character of our community.

We thank you for your consideration of our input.

Very truly yours,

Brad and Alisa Johnson

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Brad and Alisa Johnson.

August 16, 2020

City of Naperville
Historic Preservation Commission
400 S. Eagle Street
Naperville, IL 60540

Dear City of Naperville and HPC,

My name is Steve Schmieder and my wife, Mary, and I reside at [REDACTED], located on the corner of Wright and Franklin streets across from Little Friends property. As residents of the Historic District for more than 10 years, we have serious concerns with the proposed development of the property as currently rendered by RAM West Capital, LLC. For the reasons listed below we believe the development plan needs to be scratched or modified significantly.

- 1) **Significant density increase.** This proposed development is simply “packing in” too many townhomes for the area. Based on this plan, a U-shaped fortress – over 3.5 stories high -- will be built around The Mansion. The Mansion, although saved and restored, will basically be hidden from view and will no longer have its prominence in defining the historic district.
- 2) **Increase in traffic congestion and noise.** With 47 two-car garages proposed, the traffic and congestion will increase significantly, especially along Columbia Street which is already busy. Plus, there is a lack of street parking for such a dense development.
- 3) **The height far exceeds surrounding neighboring homes.** The homes in the district are either 1- or 2-stories, nothing comes close to the 40 feet variance being sought.
- 4) **Rows and rows of townhomes do not fit the character of the neighborhood.** As you know, the historic district is filled with unique single-family homes. High-standing, look-alike townhomes simply do not fit with the make-up of the district.
- 5) **The proposed setback is too truncated.** Allowing a setback of only 15 feet would put the proposed townhomes right on top of neighboring homes, eliminating the openness that now exists and greatly reducing natural light to the surrounding homes.
- 6) **Loss of age-old trees.** Many of the trees on the property are decades old, including a magnificent maple tree. Per the plan, most of these trees would be eliminated – again destroying the character and charm of the Historic District.

For the reasons, we strongly urge the HPC and the City of Naperville to reject the development plan as rendered and ask for significant modifications that lessen the density of homes, reduces the height of the homes, increases the setback to existing standards, and saves the age-old trees on the property.

Thank you for listening to our concerns.

Sincerely,
Steve and Mary Schmieder
[REDACTED]

Mattingly, Gabrielle

From: Mattingly, Gabrielle
Sent: Thursday, August 20, 2020 5:40 PM
To: Mattingly, Gabrielle
Subject: FW: Basic Massing study
Attachments: NP Kroehler SFH vs RH-1.pdf

From: Naperville Preservation [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, August 14, 2020 12:17 PM
To: Russell, Kathleen <RussellK@naperville.il.us>
Subject: Basic Massing study

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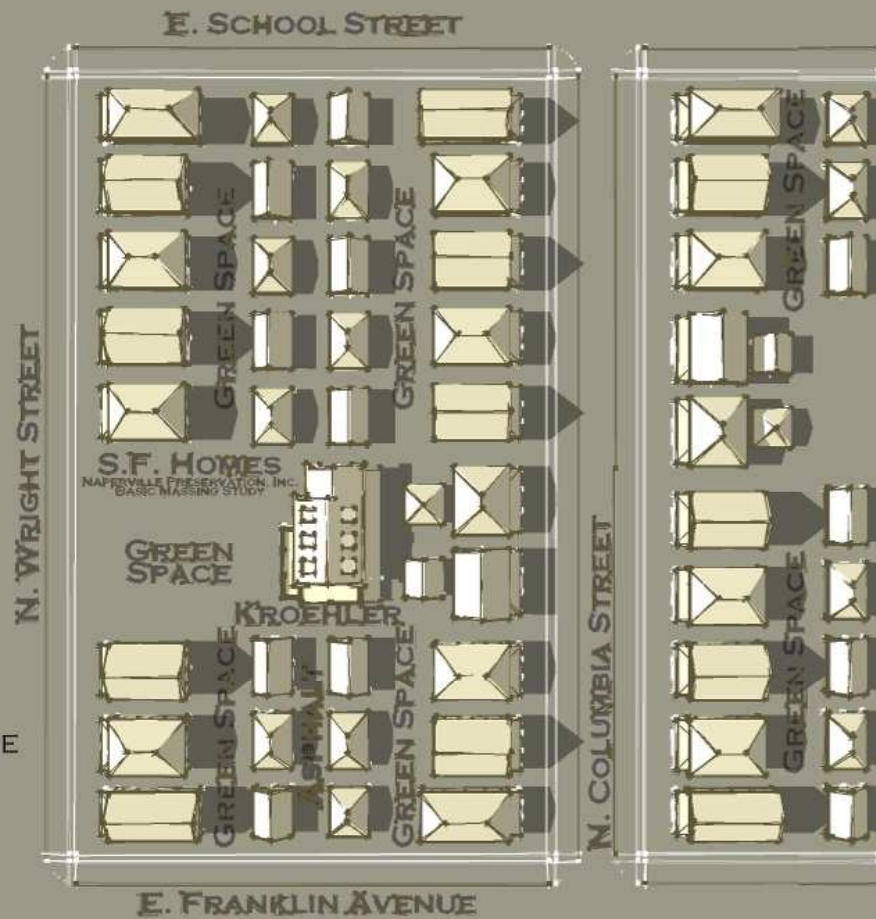
Historic Preservation Commission Members,

As they say, a picture speaks a thousand words. So we have prepared for you some visual aids in anticipation of the Kroehler Mansion property review process. The pdf below is a comparison of single family housing vs. row homes.

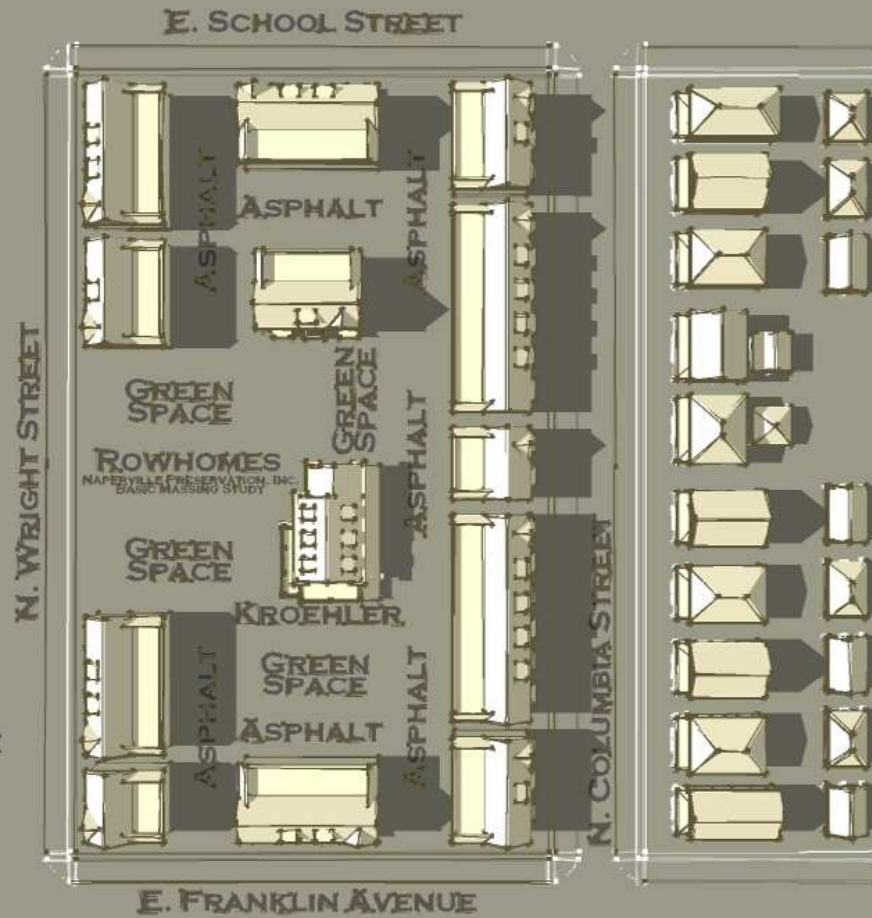
Regards,

Becky Simon

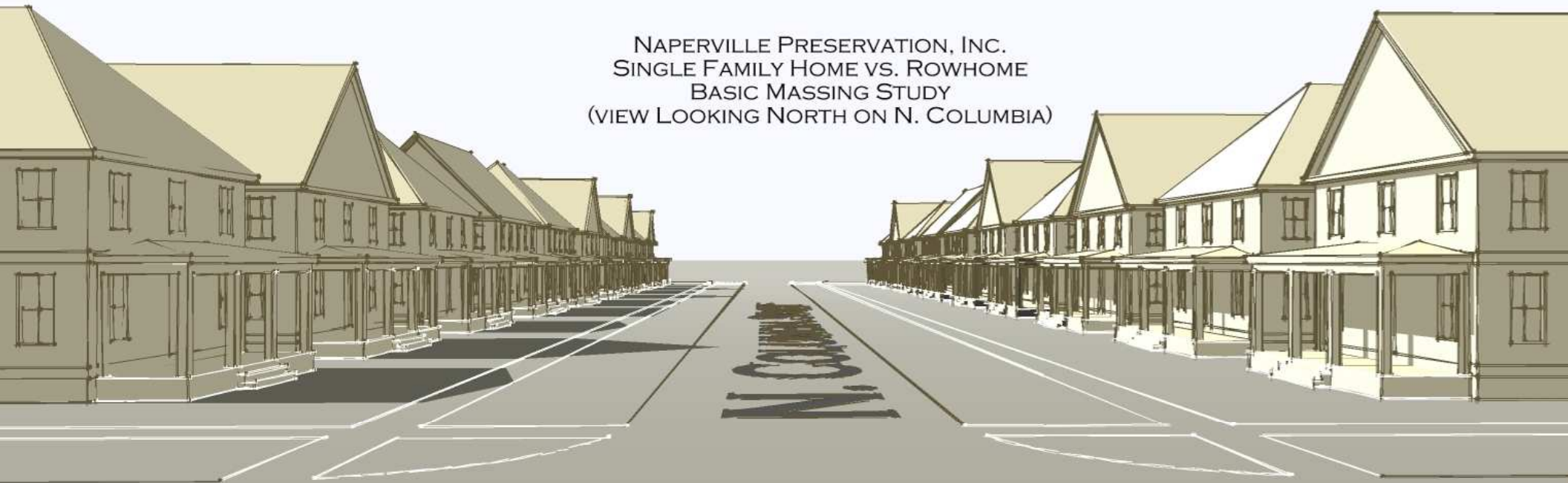
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SINGLE FAMILY HOME VS. ROWHOME
BASIC MASSING STUDY



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BASIC MASSING STUDY



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SINGLE FAMILY HOME VS. ROWHOME
BASIC MASSING STUDY
(VIEW LOOKING NORTH ON N. COLUMBIA)



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SINGLE FAMILY HOME VS. ROWHOME
BASIC MASSING STUDY
(VIEW LOOKING NORTH ON N. COLUMBIA)



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SINGLE FAMILY HOME VS. ROWHOME
BASIC MASSING STUDY
(VIEW FROM WRIGHT STREET)



NAPERVILLE PRESERVATION, INC.
SINGLE FAMILY HOME VS. ROWHOME
BASIC MASSING STUDY
(VIEW FROM WRIGHT STREET)

