

May 5, 2005

Mr. J. Michael Orange
City of Minneapolis
Community Planning and Economic Development
Planning Division
350 South 5th Street, Room 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1385

Dear Mr. Orange:

This letter is intended as comment on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) recently completed for the Pillsbury A Mill Complex. Thank you for your continued work on this project, and for the ample opportunity for public comment and response.

Taken together, the final EIS with attached commentary by various agencies and citizens provides a compelling picture of the problems still to be solved before this development proposal should be granted final approval—and there are many. At the same time, it is encouraging that there seems to be near-unanimous agreement on the importance of this National Historic Landmark, and the need to find a development solution that preserves it for the benefit and understanding of future generations.

A common theme in comments on the draft is the severe choice that is presented by the four alternatives presented in the EIS. Alternatives one through three have various levels of detrimental impact on the historic resources and would require variances in the current city code. This naturally leaves alternative four as the preferred solution, except that the developer has stated that this alternative is not financially feasible. I think that this is a false choice, and that it would be shortsighted for the City of Minneapolis to accept this seemingly irreconcilable conflict without much more study and review.

Minnesota is well known for its leadership in finding creative solutions to historic preservation problems, and Minneapolis has been a large part of that reputation. The recent developments in the West Side Milling District are a prime example of what can be achieved when we accept challenging problems head-on and work towards adaptive reuse that is both respectful of our historical resources while remaining financially feasible. In that spirit, before this project is moved past the conceptual phase, the developer's proposal should be pushed to further explore options that do not present such stark choices.

At the same time, I would urge the city and the developer to keep this project moving as fast as possible within those parameters. The Pillsbury A Mill is one of our national treasures, and we must find a meaningful use for it before it falls victim to any of the problems that are so prevalent when a building sits vacant. Furthermore, once final plans are approved, the city should demand as part of that approval that the redevelopment of the A Mill itself be completed in the first phase of work. It is simply too valuable to wait at the end of the line in a development project that could last over many years.

Finally, I find it thrilling that progress is being made to find a meaningful, ongoing use for this site. The developers should be commended for their commitment to do right by this site, and you and other city officials should be commended for your diligent work so far. This foundation should serve you well as you try to achieve the right solutions for this complicated situation.

Sincerely,

John Crippen
Director of Mill City and History Center Museums