

Southampton Neighbors Join in Opposition to High Rise in Their Midst

By Chris Amandes

The Southampton and Boulevard Oaks neighborhoods have mobilized and are fully engaged in the fight against the Ashby High-Rise project.

Five of our neighbors spoke before City Council last Tuesday to express the many serious reasons why this development is completely inappropriate in its proposed location. A 23-story tower that includes a restaurant, retail space, a rooftop lounge,

and 17 floors of condo or apartment units would dramatically increase traffic on both two-lane streets that abut the lot, threaten emergency access, introduce light and visual pollution, destroy residential property values, and generally degrade the surrounding areas.

It is inconceivable that Matthew Morgan and Kevin Kirton, two former neighborhood residents who profess to be "sensitive" to the area, are promoting a project so shockingly indifferent to a graceful neighborhood of 80-year-old single-family houses and majestic live oaks. We are dedicated to continuing this battle as long as it takes to produce a project that is acceptable to the neighborhood.

Yet while we fight to protect our neighborhood from this offensive project, we recognize few neighborhood associations in the city of Houston have the time, organization, and resources to keep on battling one inappropriate project after another. Southampton and Boulevard Oaks are fortunate to have several thousand angry, organized, and experienced volunteers who know how to wage this kind of fight.

But it is not enough that we fight just this fight. Without a long-term solution, the residents of our neighborhood and every other neighborhood in Houston will be forced to fight these battles endlessly. No city should require its residents to regularly put aside their jobs and their families to protect the quality of their lives and their investments in their homes, because that is what we expect our government to do for us.

The Mayor and City Council are listening to homeowners and voters and considering carefully crafted solutions to prevent the destructive effects on neighborhoods that projects like the Ashby High Rise project would cause. We would like to work with the city to produce an ordinance that requires a traffic impact analysis and addresses access issues for any high-density development.

We also want to explore protections that address the height and mass of buildings in relation to the surrounding single family residential properties, perhaps using the many quality high-rise developments in Houston as the model. Such ordinances are needed to safeguard our homes, the largest financial investments that most of us will make, as well as our quality of life.

If we work together and focus on our common goals, a solution should emerge that protects all of Houston's neighborhoods while not interfering with sensible and appropriate urban redevelopment.

The Southampton and Boulevard Oaks neighborhoods are working not only to block the Ashby High Rise project but also to shape and adopt the types of ordinances that will ensure that the Ashby High Rise fight is the last fight of its kind.

We encourage all Houstonians to work with us in this effort so that all of our neighborhoods can benefit from these necessary and overdue protections.

Amandes is a Southampton resident and a member of the Southampton (Civic Club) Legal Committee.





Protest in Southampton

Southampton residents and supporters turned out en masse Wednesday afternoon for a protest at the site of a proposed 23-story apartment building at Bissonnet and Ashby. Hundreds of people, carrying placards and some dressed in costumes, demonstrated for about an hour and a half.

Photos by Ben Ballanfant

