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July 18, 2024

Plan Commission Chair and Commissioners
Village of Oak Park
123 Madison Street
Oak Park, IL 60302

Sent via email to Craig Failor, Village Planner, at cfailor@oak-park.us

Re: Special Use Permit for Rezoning of St. Catherine - St. Lucy

Dear Plan Commission Chair and Commissioners:

As the Executive Director of the Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County, I am pleased to write a letter of support for the request of a special use permit to rezone St. Catherine - St. Lucy as a Community Service Center that will include a year-round emergency shelter for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

The Alliance is designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as the lead agency for the Cook County Continuum of Care (CoC IL-511). Our assigned geography includes all 130 Cook County suburbs located outside the City of Chicago. As the lead agency for the Cook County CoC, we are responsible for leading a coordinated, comprehensive, community-wide homelessness response system that prevents homelessness whenever possible, provides emergency shelter for those in crisis, and connects individuals and families with the housing and services they need to thrive.

Our CoC member agencies take on the responsibility of providing these vital, front-line services to people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Housing Forward has been a CoC member agency since our founding nearly two decades ago and plays an integral role in our CoC's strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness.

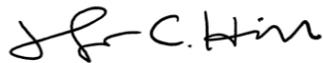
Providing emergency shelter is a vital component of our CoC's homeless response system. At the beginning of the pandemic, our CoC lost a critical mass of emergency shelter beds. Our emergency shelter capacity relied on donated space in places of worship that rotated on different nights of the week. When this model was no longer available because of public health concerns for volunteers and shelter guests, our community lost 70% of our available shelter beds.

The Alliance engaged a national consulting firm specializing in homelessness response systems to scope our community's need for crisis housing interventions. Based on that analysis, we found that suburban Cook County needs at least 564 new or reconfigured units of shelter to provide immediate safety to those experiencing homelessness.

The use of St. Catherine - St. Lucy as a year-round, 40-bed emergency shelter for individuals and families experiencing a housing crisis is essential for our community to reach the target number of emergency shelter beds available each night.

As the leader of the Cook County Continuum of Care, the Alliance fully supports the request for a special use permit to rezone St. Catherine – St. Lucy. This request will ensure ongoing low-barrier emergency shelter and is critical for our mission to end and prevent homelessness in suburban Cook County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer C. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer C. Hill
Executive Director