

October 19, 2020

Mayor Dan Devine and  
West Allis Common Council  
City of West Allis  
7525 W. Greenfield Ave., Room 123  
West Allis, WI 53214

**Re: Beyond Vision Proposal  
Common Council Meeting 10/20/2020  
Agenda Item No. 36, File #O-2020-0043**

Dear Mayor Devine and Members of the Common Council:

I am writing this letter to encourage your support for the proposal by Beyond Vision to create a Visibility Center at the former Sam's Club building on Highway 100 in West Allis. I am strongly moved and believe this is an outstanding mutual opportunity for Beyond Vision and West Allis to enhance the urban fabric, further add to the remarkable "Renaissance" of West Allis, and pay homage to the roots of West Allis—a place where people made products which provided well-paying jobs for the citizens of Metro Milwaukee. In this case, Beyond Vision, due to its mission, is quite unique because it provides these jobs to legally blind or totally blind individuals whose demographic characteristic generally has a 70% unemployment rate.

#### Enhance the Urban Fabric

We are experiencing unprecedented times (politics and pandemic aside) when traditional retail activities have been disrupted by technology and the advent of online shopping and direct delivery. As a result, many retail stores have gone dark throughout the United States and have become eyesores on our urban landscape. Many of these stores are difficult to repurpose, especially those as large as a former Sam's Club. Beyond Vision is planning to invest substantially in the external appearance of the building as well as repurposing its interior. Furthermore, I understand they are willing to convert acres of asphalt into green space. Combined, the end product is likely to meet or exceed any municipality's expectations for an alternative use to a large black box surrounded by a field of asphalt.

#### Add to the "Renaissance" of West Allis

Some of you may know my wife Eileen grew up in West Allis. While we were extremely interested as a company to partner with West Allis, Eileen has taken great pride that Mandel Group has participated in the Renaissance of West Allis. We hope to continue on that path.

As a partner with West Allis, we recognize that West Allis needs to maintain and increase its tax base in order to provide the municipal services to support the community. It is my understanding that, as part of their proposal, Beyond Vision is willing to pay a PILOT to West Allis equal to 100% of West Allis's share of the tax revenue. That PILOT contribution will satisfy that concern of lost tax revenue. In addition, many of those working at Beyond Vision will utilize the bus line that is already in place. That contributes to the critical mass of users, which is good for Milwaukee County at large.

A renaissance of a community is about more than the buildings that are created or the tax base they generate. It is also about uplifting a community and its reputation. Finding a way to include a company like Beyond Vision enriches the spirit and soul of West Allis. It illustrates leadership and underscores a moral and ethical imperative that distinguishes communities that others want to live in and/or work within.

#### Roots of West Allis

The history of West Allis is rich in the manufacturing of products in the USA. Those factories supported so many families in West Allis and throughout Metro Milwaukee. The decline of manufacturing took its toll on West Allis and the thousands of jobs that were lost. At the same time, like the recent decline of retail stores, the old and vacant factories stood as a blight on the urban landscape. West Allis recreated itself, repurposed buildings when possible and redeveloped from the ground up when appropriate.

Before you is an opportunity to combine the best of West Allis's history and West Allis's grit to find a way to redevelop its community. Breathing life into this dark black box and repurposing the Sam's Club as proposed by Beyond Vision will rekindle light manufacturing jobs—in this case, well-paying jobs for talented and capable workers who are visually impaired.

#### Conclusion: Find a Way – It is Good Business.

I recognize that the current zoning code needs to be modified to move forward with Beyond Vision's proposal. The recommended solution of adding a narrowly defined Special Use under the current zoning is an elegant and efficient way to accomplish the task. The percentage of light manufacturing that will occur within the scope of Beyond Vision's proposal, without any noise, pollution, or odors of any kind, is incidental to the overall use of the property with no deleterious impact to the neighborhood. In return, West Allis continues its Renaissance, recreating itself with a more brilliant rewoven urban fabric, creation of well-paying jobs, enhanced tax base and support of a company that is truly special. It is simply good business to approve Beyond Vision's request, as you reinvest in your community. The dividends are bound to be great.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. If I sound passionate, I am, as I have been inspired by Beyond Vision's purpose, mission and results.

Very truly yours,



Barry R. Mandel  
Chairman & CEO