

Members of the Planning & Zoning Commission

City Council Members

City of Grand Forks

Re: Agenda Item 4-1 – Proposed Rezoning for 2800 South Columbia Road

Dear Commissioners and Council Members,

We respectfully submit this response to the comments provided by GK Real Estate regarding the proposed rezoning and redevelopment of the former Macy's building at Columbia Mall.

At the core of GK's objection is a misplaced premise. The concern is not that this project would diminish the value of Columbia Mall, but that it would increase the value. Framing this redevelopment as harmful ignores both market reality and GK's own track record.

Market Reality

The former Macy's building has been vacant for almost a decade, and there is no realistic prospect of a national department store or large-format retailer returning to this site. Prolonged vacancy has already harmed the mall's vitality. Adaptive reuse is a widely accepted response to anchor failure and is preferable to continued deterioration.

GK's Ownership History

GK cites other malls as cautionary examples, but the most relevant comparisons are properties owned by GK itself:

- Lakeview Square Mall (Battle Creek, MI): Within a few years of GK ownership, the mall lost all three anchor tenants and large portion of its in-line retailers. Only after the major anchor tenants were lost and retailers left was when the storage project came to the center
- Ridgmar Mall (Fort Worth, TX): Following GK's acquisition, this mall also lost three anchors within a few years and declined from approximately 120 retailers to about 30 today (as far as we can tell). A self-storage use was introduced only after anchors were already gone and vacancy was severe.

In both cases, anchor loss preceded tenant decline. Non-retail reuse did not cause these outcomes; it followed them. These two examples represent 2 of the 5 malls GK appears to own. [Portfolio Archive - GK Real Estate](#)

It is also worth noting that GK has already introduced non-retail uses within Columbia Mall on multiple incidences and that the mentioned restrictive retail-only covenants in the Reciprocal Easement Agreement expire in July 2028. Approving this rezoning now allows the city to proactively support reinvestment, improve a prominent corridor, and stabilize the tax base rather than allow continued deterioration.

Conclusion

A vacant anchor is already the mall's front door. A fully occupied, well-maintained redevelopment improves the site, stabilizes the tax base, and supports surrounding uses. Preventing reinvestment in hopes of a failed retail model returning does not protect Columbia Mall — it accelerates its decline.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge approval of the proposed rezoning.

Sincerely,

Midtown Ventures, LLC