

## OPINION

### EVERYBODY'S COLUMN

#### Kaleida should rethink Gates Circle developer

Chason Affinity's proposal to reuse the Millard Fillmore site as a veterinarian teaching hospital may well be "visionary." But more than an inspired idea will be needed if Kaleida Health is to reach its laudable goals for reuse of the prominent landmark.

The expressed purpose of Kaleida's million-dollar development competition was to "get the best ideas and the most capable developers to do something great" with the hospital site — great for the neighborhood, city, developer and Kaleida. For that goal to be met, Chason Affinity will need to substantially up its game from its performance the past several years at the southeast corner of Elmwood and Forest avenues.

In 2007, with vague plans to construct student housing, a Chason Affinity subsidiary signed a contract to buy several century-old buildings at Elmwood and Forest. A year-and-a-half later, despite a risky financial market, a group of unhappy

neighbors and deed restrictions prohibiting "any business establishment," Affinity proceeded with the purchase, spending nearly \$2 million for 11 parcels. When the developer subsequently announced its vision for the "gateway to the Elmwood Village," it proposed construction of a six-story, 175,000-square-foot "mixed-use" project poorly suited for the neighborhood, rather than the creative reuse of the quintessential "Elmwood Village" properties.

Unable to persuade the adjoining owners to approve its project, Affinity is now in court seeking to extinguish the restrictive covenants that protect its neighbors. During the intervening years, the developer's properties have been allowed to deteriorate in plain sight of residents, commuters and tourists. Affinity has been recently cited for code violations at eight of its properties.

Kaleida may want to think long and hard before designating Affinity the developer of the Gates Circle site.

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