

Keillor sues neighbor over addition

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Lutherans of Lake Wobegon would most likely fume in silence, but Garrison Keillor, creator of the fictional town and among St. Paul's most famous citizens, isn't being quite so quiet.

Keillor and his wife, Jenny Lind Nilsson, are suing their next-door neighbor, Lori Anderson, to stop her from building a two-story addition to her home that would include a three-stall garage and studio.

The lawsuit, filed Monday in Ramsey County District Court, claims the addition would "obstruct the access of light and air to the Nilsson-Keillor property" and "impair or destroy protected historical resources."

Both homes are within the Ramsey Hill historic district.

The complaint also said the project would obstruct their view "of open space and beyond" and possibly hurt property value. The estimated market value a year ago for Keillor's home was about \$1.2 million, according to property tax records; Anderson's was about \$600,000.

The city also is named a defendant in the documents, which said Keillor and his wife were not notified of public hearings before a zoning variance was approved and the project was OK'd by the Heritage Preservation

Commission.

Anderson, who has owned her home since 1999 and lives there with fiance Paul Olson, said Monday that Keillor and his wife have been good neighbors and that she is wary of offending them.

"We were heartsick," Anderson said of learning about the suit.

Olson said when he and Anderson decided to marry, they realized their one-car garage wasn't big enough. Even before they hired an architect, the couple said they talked to neighbors. They planned to build three stalls, a storage area and a mudroom on the first floor and a studio for Anderson's business on the second. The addition would be a few feet lower than the existing home and would be attached to the rear.

The project would add about 1,900 finished and unfinished square feet to the home, which now has 2,124 finished square feet. The Keillor-Nilsson home has 5,168 finished square feet, according to tax records.

Anderson and Olson received a zoning variance for a 23-foot rear-yard setback rather than the standard 25 feet and conditional approval from the Heritage Preservation Commission, pending final approval of the plans.

The nine-page complaint filed by Keillor and his wife claims "the city's

decision to grant ... Anderson's variance is arbitrary and capricious."

City Attorney John Choi said Monday that "we have reviewed the plaintiffs' allegations in the complaint and find them to be without merit. It is our position that the city, Board of Zoning Appeals and the Heritage Preservation Commission acted in compliance with the law and within our legal discretion."

Olson said Monday that Keillor and his wife "couldn't have cared less" when Anderson told them they were building a bigger garage.

"He's a busy guy," Olson said. "We didn't feel obligated to include him in the planning."

Olson said he and Anderson were on vacation in New Zealand when they received "an angry e-mail" from Keillor on Nov. 29. The e-mail accused Anderson and Olson of building "a carriage house" and said, "If we had known, we would have been horrified. ... Neighbors do not deal with neighbors the way you dealt with us."

Anderson and Olson cut short their vacation and returned home, hoping to talk to Keillor and Nilsson.

"We wrote them a very conciliatory e-mail to say we'll do anything we can to work it out," Anderson said. "They refused to talk to us."