

May 5, 2021

Members of the St. Paul City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. W.
310 City Hall
St. Paul, MN 55102

Re: Support for Public Works Department Recommendation to Locate Capital City Bikeway on Wabasha Street

Dear Council President Brendmoen, and Councilmembers:

We represent the Downtown Business and Neighborhood Coalition consisting of over 40 businesses, nonprofit associations, and residents, working, living, and operating in downtown St. Paul, along St. Peter Street and Wabasha Street - including the Rice Park Association. We respectfully submit this letter to express our support for expanding the Capital City Bikeway along Wabasha Street as recommended by the St. Paul Public Works Department and to strongly state our opposition to the Bikeway being located on St. Peter Street for all the reasons set forth in this letter. We encourage the City Council to support the Wabasha Street plan because it best serves the City and best meets the transportation, housing and economic development, public safety, historic preservation, and downtown development goals of the City.

1. Support for Wabasha Street as Best Meeting the City's Urban Planning and Economic Development Goals

Support for expanding the Bikeway along Wabasha Street is shared by groups and individuals from all over the City. Not only does Wabasha Street connect the West Side to the State Capitol complex, but Wabasha Street has several vacant lots and buildings that create greater economic development potential from the proposed bikeway. Wabasha Street has far less street-level retail space than St. Peter Street that requires suitable on-street parking, and restricting parking to one side of Wabasha Street would not impact the same number of street-level restaurants as would be impacted on St. Peter Street.

Wabasha Street is a direct link to and from the State Capitol to the City's West Side, Harriet Island Park, and Lilydale Regional Park and regional biking trails - vital elements of achieving the City's goals included in the Great River Passage Master Plan. Similarly, adjoining these amenities to downtown would safely and efficiently connect hundreds of thousands of people who attend events on Harriet Island each year to Wabasha's central commuter corridor of the City and meet the goals of developing the West Side Flats as outlined in the West Side Flats Master Plan and Development Guidelines that was adopted by the City Council in June 2015. The City already has a long-term parking plan that imposes less than a 1:1 resident to parking stall ratio to encourage alternative modes of transportation. Connecting the West Side Flats via a

direct bike lane on Wabasha Street would help the city meet those goals of connecting residents to downtown jobs.

Wabasha Street is home to numerous new developments that would welcome bike commuter access via a dedicated bike lane for their employees. For example, the owners of Osborn370 invested \$20 million to redevelop the former EcoLab Plaza to serve small and large innovative companies that now houses over 400 employees commuting into the City each day. These owners strongly support the bikeway being located on Wabasha Street.

2. Negative Economic and Transportation Impact on City's Main Event, Visitor, and Entertainment Corridor

After many years, and millions of dollars in public and private investments, we have created a central dining and entertainment corridor along St. Peter Street that has revitalized our city and downtown which provides a vital entertainment district for the hundreds of thousands of visitors coming to St. Paul each year to all our City's major event centers and attractions all around the Rice Park Neighborhood. In fact, the Rice Park Association has adopted a Resolution opposing the Bikeway being located on St. Peter Street and supporting it on Wabasha Street (see attached Resolution).

St. Peter Street has become the signature thoroughfare of St. Paul's burgeoning entertainment industry, connecting some of St. Paul's most renowned restaurants with the Twin Cities' busiest entertainment venues like Ordway Center, River Centre, Landmark Center, Science Museum, Palace Theatre, Park Square Theatre, and Xcel Energy Center. On any given night, 20,000-30,000 people from around the entire state will come to this very successful St. Peter Street/Rice Park area Entertainment District utilizing St. Peter Street to connect them to the Entertainment and restaurant venues within this historic district along St. Peter Street.

The Hamm Building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, has undergone over \$20 million in privately financed renovations in recent years and relies on the availability of on-street parking for its customers' access to the tenants who operate retail businesses and restaurants along St. Peter. A new bike lane would eliminate at least 50 percent of the available parking to these businesses. Generating more street-level vitality is a stated goal of the Mayor and the City. Locating the bikeway on St. Peter Street would negatively impact the economic success of restaurants and retailers along St. Peter and risk the years of growth that our St. Peter Street restaurants, like Meritage, the Loon Cafe, Kincaid's, the St. Paul Hotel, and Sakura have experienced.

The bikeway on St. Peter Street would eliminate critical, on-street loading space for the City-owned Palace Theatre - a \$16 million, publicly funded capital project that has brought over 65 shows and over 110,000 people to downtown St. Paul in its first year of operation. Competition for venues seeking to host live shows is fierce, and without easy, logistical access to the Palace, groups will seek out friendlier spaces to perform.

Locating the bikeway on the west side of St. Peter would eliminate loading space for the St. Paul Hotel, and waste management services for Mickey's Diner.

The great economic benefits to the city of all these restaurants and retailers, and the costs they would incur due to the location of a new bikeway on St. Peter Street are crucial considerations for locating the bikeway on Wabasha Street rather than St. Peter.

3. Reduced Safety for Drivers and Bikers

The traffic engineer hired by our Coalition, in consultation with transportation experts from Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Washington, and Minneapolis, has made the following conclusion regarding the placement of a new bike lane in St. Paul: the proposed bikeway should be located on Wabasha Street rather than St. Peter Street because it is safer for bikers.

First, the safest placement of a two-way bike lane like the one proposed in the current bikeway plan, where one bike lane would be traveling against traffic on a one-way street – is on the left-hand side of traffic. Therefore, the bike lane proposal along the right side (west side) of St. Peter Street would be considered unsafe for cyclists as it places the bike lane on the right side of traffic. The placement of the Bikeway on the left side (west side) of Wabasha Street is the preferred, safer alternative.

Second, the safest location for any bike lane is a route that directly links riders to the City's key destinations, not requiring bikers to unnecessarily turn on to and off of other busy streets. All proposed plans involving St. Peter Street would require bikers to turn on to and off of Kellogg Boulevard - a heavily trafficked commuting artery of the city when connecting cyclists to the Wabasha Street bridge, the West Side, and regional bike trails. If the Capital City Bikeway was constructed along Wabasha Street, bikers would have a single street to navigate from the highly used Harriet Island/Lilydale bike path to the Capitol complex rather than contending with the dangerous necessity to change streets multiple times on Kellogg Boulevard.

Further, Wabasha Street is a designated commuter route with known and consistent traffic patterns. This predictability of automobile traffic is safer for bikers. St. Peter Street is the main entrance to the City's tourism district. Drivers who are unfamiliar with downtown traffic flows and pedestrian traffic coming in contact with cyclists would make St. Peter Street a more dangerous route for bikers.

Finally, preserving outdoor café space is a stated goal of the City. Under all current bikeway plan options utilizing St. Peter Street, the only way to meet that goal and retain café space along St. Peter - at restaurants like Meritage and the Loon Café - is to remove an entire lane of traffic, making St. Peter Street one-lane, or narrow both lanes from 12 feet to 10 feet, creating new dangers for drivers and logistical complications for snow removal in the winter.

Overall, expanding the Capital City Bikeway via Wabasha Street would be a better option for the city and would not risk a negative economic impact on the City's central entertainment corridor. The renowned businesses that have rebuilt St. Paul's dining and entertainment industry rely on St. Peter Street to remain successful. The interruption a bikeway would cause for these businesses would require these businesses to shut down or look for alternative locations that can meet their needs. This would be devastating to a district still working to maintain its success in a competitive environment where more convenient locations or dining experiences are found nearby or in Minneapolis.

For all the reasons set forth in this letter, we respectfully request that the City Council support the expansion of the Capital City Bikeway along Wabasha Street as recommended by the St. Paul Public Works Department.

Sincerely,

St. Peter Street Properties:

Tim Dwyer

Hamm Building (owned by Markham
Company of St. Paul)

Ken Wieber

The Saint Paul Hotel

Russell & Desta Klein

Meritage Restaurant (Hamm Building)

Melissa Mattson

Mickey's Diner

Kai Peterson

Ecolab

David Soos

The Saint Paul Grill

Mary Arvanitis

Original Coney Island Properties

**Tim Mahoney, Laura Southwell,
& Amy Ochsner**

The Loon Café (Hamm Building)

Amy Mino

Rice Park Association (Landmark Center)

Sarah Kohler

Landmark Jewelers (Hamm Building)

Justin Spano

The Saint Paul Hotel

Nathan Kranz

Palace Theatre (Managed by First Avenue)

Sheryl Vatne

Kincaid's (Infor Commons)

Deb Rodahl

HealthEast St. Joseph's Hospital

Michael Pease

Park Square Theatre (Hamm Building)

Richard Dobransky, President

Morrissey Hospitality and 360 St. Peter
Street

Wabasha Street Properties:

Rich Pakonen

Osborn370

Nathan Kranz

The Fitzgerald Theater & Palace Theatre

Kai Peterson

Ecolab Global Communications Center

Ken Wieber

Morrissey Hospitality (St. Paul Building)

Lacey Joy Thiessen

Stacked Deck Brewing Company (Treasure Island Center)