



October 23, 2014

Council President Kathy Lantry and
Members of the City Council
City of Saint Paul
320 City Hall
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

VIA EMAIL

Re: 543 James Avenue (Zoning File No. 14-319-416)

Dear Council President Lantry and Members of the City Council:

As the State's largest local chamber and an advocate for expanding the tax base through private investment, the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce (SPACC) writes to express its strong support for Premier Storage's proposed internalized self-storage facility at 543 James Avenue. For the reasons discussed in greater detail below, we urge members of the city council to affirm the decision of the planning commission and approve this important project.

Premier Storage is interested in making a significant economic investment in Saint Paul by converting an empty warehouse into a community self-storage facility. The warehouse has been used for industrial storage and warehouse purposes, including as a construction materials storage area during the most recent artist lofts construction. For the past five years, the property has been for sale or lease. Unfortunately, there has not been any interest in the property. In 2008, the city rezoned the area where the property is located from an industrial district to a traditional neighborhood district. Several years later, the city issued preliminary approval for a microbrewery and restaurant at the site. However, despite these changes, the building continues to be vacant.

The warehouse consists of 78,000 square feet and is constructed of tilt-up concrete and steel with few windows. The building is in good condition. However, because of the building's construction, the state of its condition, and its location next to a rail line, it is not practical or economical to reuse the warehouse for certain types of uses, including residential housing. These limitations help explain why there has been little interest in the building and make it easy to understand how important Premier Storage's proposed use is to Saint Paul.

Premier Storage is proposing to convert approximately 45,000 square feet of the vacant warehouse into a fully-enclosed, climate controlled self-storage facility. The remaining area will be made available for a use that is permitted under current zoning regulations, such as a microbrewery or restaurant. To achieve this vision, Premier Storage will make an investment of more than \$1 million into

the property. This investment will increase the value of the property, expand Saint Paul's tax base, and provide the community with a much needed amenity.

The proposed use is supported by city staff, the zoning committee, and the planning commission. At each stage of the regulatory process, Premier Storage's proposed use has received the support of the reviewing body. This is telling. It demonstrates that this project is supported by the community, including neighboring residents. As part of the zoning-application process, Premier Storage was required to obtain support from at least two-thirds of property owners within 100 feet of the vacant warehouse. More than 70 percent of neighboring owners voiced their support for the proposal.

SPACC believes the proposed use would enhance the community and preserve the development character of the neighborhood. The vacant warehouse was originally part of the historic Jacob Schmidt Brewery site. Its prior uses have always been industrial in nature. When viewed as part of the larger brewery site, the proposed use is consistent with Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan. The zoning committee and planning commission agree with this assessment.

Moreover, if the city council reverses the planning commission's approval of Premier Storage's land use application, SPACC is concerned by the precedent that will be set in overturning projects that have received support from residents, city staff, the zoning committee, and the planning commission. If this precedent is established, it may send a negative message to property owners and businesses considering making investments in Saint Paul. Additionally, we are concerned that the city may be subjected to a costly lawsuit if this project is not approved.

In conclusion, SPACC supports the proposed self-storage use at 543 James Avenue. Similar to the city's zoning committee and planning commission, we believe this project is good for Saint Paul. We encourage the city council to uphold the planning commission's decision and approve this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MK', followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that extends to the right.

Matt Kramer
President

cc: Chris Coleman, Mayor, City of Saint Paul
Bill Dermody, Planner, City of Saint Paul