



West Side Community Organization
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Saint Paul City Council
City Hall Legislative Hearing Room 330
15 Kellogg Boulevard West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Saint Paul City Council members:

The Saint Paul Planning Commission issued a Conditional Use Permit to Hawkins, Inc., a chemical distributor on Barge Channel Road, on April 16, 2015. A group of concerned West Side residents filed an appeal challenging this decision on May 4, 2015. The West Side Community Organization (WSCO) was not directly involved in this appeal in our official role as a District Council. However, we have followed the robust, resident-driven conversation these actions have generated in the past 60 days. We wish to echo some of the concerns raised by West Side residents with regard to health-related environmental impacts of industrial zoning corridors.

Evaluate land use and zoning on the West Side

The recently adopted West Side Community Plan (February 2013)—an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan—describes land use objectives and strategies to “support land use that balances the housing, commercial, industrial, ecological, agricultural and green space needs of the community.” One specific, high-priority task is to develop a plan for Barge Channel Road designed to mitigate the industrial/residential land use. Given the concerns raised by West Side residents, we feel this process will be a key piece to educating our community about the relevant zoning, traffic access, flood and river planning and environmental issues of this longstanding, and often contested, industrial corridor.

We request staff support from the City of Saint Paul’s Department of Planning and Economic Development, and direct funding from the City Council to form a WSCO-led workgroup and several community engagement sessions. This support will help bring key stakeholders of Barge Channel Road to the table, and provide the resources necessary to conduct thorough outreach and engagement with West Side residents.

Understand the root causes of our elevated exposure to environmental hazards

Researchers from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) shared the results of a 90-day Community Air Monitoring Project with WSCO's Sustainable Living Committee in April. These results suggest West Side residents continue to face disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards compared with other areas across the Twin Cities. Further study is required to better understand the full scope of environmental health issues present in our community, their direct and indirect causes, and how they can be effectively addressed or mitigated.

Environmental justice will continue to be a high priority for WSCO and West Side residents. We will work closely with regulatory agencies to ensure that timely, appropriate monitoring and testing of soil, water and air take place at all available opportunities. These results will be widely shared with our community.

Improve process for District Council recommendations

One of the primary functions of Saint Paul's District Councils is "to provide advisory recommendations to city officials on physical, economic and social development issues." To perform this duty to the highest possible standard requires us to bring issues to our respective committees, the WSCO board of directors and—in some cases—organize additional community engagement sessions with West Side residents. These steps are crucial to understanding the full-range of perspectives within our diverse community; completing this process results in recommendations that are well-informed, well-considered and well-spoken in our collective voice.

Too often we are notified of pending decisions with a very limited timeframe to make our recommendations, creating a tension between community interest and concern and our ability to respond. ***We ask the Saint Paul City Council and the Saint Paul District Council Coordinator to take this under advisement and develop a process for better coordination.***

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