

**From:** [Chelsea DeArmond](#)  
**To:** [\\*CI-StPaul\\_Contact-Council](#)  
**Subject:** Letter from Unidos Saint Paul regarding ORD 24-32  
**Date:** Monday, October 21, 2024 1:11:53 PM

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You don't often get email from [chelsea@unidos-mn.org](mailto:chelsea@unidos-mn.org). [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Saint Paul City Council members,

Please see the attached [letter from Unidos Saint Paul](#), regarding Ordinance 24-32 - Amending the gas and electric franchises, scheduled for its first hearing this Wednesday.

Best Regards,  
Chelsea DeArmond  
Unidos Saint Paul, Climate Organizer

Oct. 20, 2024

Dear Saint Paul City Council,

Members of Unidos Saint Paul (formerly St. Paul 350), your constituents, have done our best to meet with you over the course of this last year to express the urgency we feel about the climate crisis. We talked to you about policy and funding ideas that we think will help to address this crisis. We were very encouraged that in our conversations, every single one of you identified climate & equity as top priorities.

For these reasons, we are surprised and disappointed that some Councilmembers—maybe the majority—are considering not supporting the ordinance that will authorize the new franchise fees in the 2025 budget. As you know, this new revenue represents thousands of grassroots organizing hours from your own constituents. The reason we fought for this is because [franchise fees are the best opportunity cities have to raise revenue for climate action \(here are some recent examples\)](#). Since 1979, state law prohibited Saint Paul from collecting half the franchise fee revenue that every other city in the state collects. We organized to change that law so Saint Paul could fund the climate action that all our council members say they want.

The Power of Home program is exactly the kind of equitable climate action we've been asking for—a block by block approach to funding weatherization for energy-burdened households in preparation for the transition to clean heat. We thought our Councilmembers would be allies in increasing the small amount of funding proposed for it by authorizing franchise fees for all the winter months, not just November and April. Instead, at least some Councilmembers seem willing to cut all of it, even after telling us you supported our ask for \$3M for the Power of Home.

Please, pass the ordinance that will authorize the climate action revenue your constituents fought hard to win during a climate emergency you declared. We are eager to discuss strategies for equitably collecting and distributing these funds,\* and establishing accountability structures for ensuring they are spent appropriately. But we need a less reckless path to these conversations that respects years of grassroots organizing by your constituents.

Sincerely,  
Unidos Saint Paul

cc:

James Doyle, Ward 1 team leader

Kari Kahlil, Ward 2 team leader

Katherine DuGarm, Ward 3 team leader

Josiah Gregg, Ward 4 team leader

Drew Harper, Ward 5 team leader

Mike Hirabayashi, Ward 6 team leader

Murph Dawkins, Ward 7 team leader

\* For the Councilmembers who have asked us for energy burden data, we checked with Ramsey County Climate and Health Supervisor Abi Phillips, whose team is developing the updated energy burden data for Saint Paul's Revised Climate Action and Resilience Plan. Their analysis is based on these two Xcel service territory maps ([gas](#) and [electric](#)) and the DoE's [LEAD tool](#).

You may also be interested in the [PUC briefing papers](#) for the new [automatic bill credit program](#) for Xcel customers who pay more than 4% of their household income on electricity costs. (This program was proposed by the Equity Stakeholder Advisory Group, which includes representatives from Unidos and many of our allies.)

This automatic bill credit program will be administered by census block groups (similar to the Power of Home proposal) to eliminate access barriers and reduce administrative costs and complications. The credits will average \$458/year per household. In addition, a franchise fee exemption could save energy burdened households the extra \$16 more per year in franchise fees if all the winter months are added (this is our own estimate, thanks to Drew Harper).

Nov. 11, 2024

Dear Saint Paul City Council,

Thank you for hearing our testimony in support of Ordinance 24-32 - Amending the gas and electric franchises at the public hearing last week.

Unidos Saint Paul supports the ordinance as is. We appreciate efforts to amend the ordinance to designate the new revenue for climate funding. However, there are other opportunities to do this, including the budget negotiations happening right now and the franchise agreement negotiations that will occur over the next 18 months. We look forward to having these conversations with you. In the meantime, please approve the new franchise fees from November and April. We cannot afford to delay beginning the complex and crucial process of weatherization and electrification for Saint Paul's 42,124 energy-burdened homes (Climate Action Resilience Plan, pg. 37).

We support the proposal to spend this new revenue from energy use on staff and programs that help the City of Saint Paul meet our Climate Action and Resilience goals, including reducing energy burden with the proposed Power of Home program. [The New York Times has reported](#) that the Trump administration's climate and energy transition team will focus on "eliminating every office in every agency working to end the pollution that disproportionately affects poor communities." In light of this rollback of federal support, municipal programs like the Power of Home that will direct funding toward reducing energy costs and climate pollution for communities most in need are more important than ever.

If for any reason the funds raised by this ordinance exceed the amount needed to fund climate staff and the Power of Home program, we request that the remaining revenue be used to develop a city-wide thermal energy plan. Transitioning our city from gas to clean heat will protect people from health risks, rate increases ([especially gas](#)), and climate pollution caused by burning gas in our homes. A city-wide thermal energy plan could inform future policy and funding decisions, including the revised Climate Action & Resilience Plan (April 22, 2025), the revised franchise agreement with Xcel (Aug 31, 2026), and future budgets. It also positions the city to proactively seek state and federal funds if/when they become available and direct them where they are most needed.

Sincerely,

Unidos Saint Paul

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