



To: Saint Paul City Council

From: Union Park District Council

Re: 46 RLH TA 25-344 Amending Council File RLH AR 24-25
Union Park District Council supports a full refund of 1350 Hague Avenue's Vacant Building fee

Councilmembers,

Union Park District Council supports a full refund of 1350 Hague Avenue's Vacant Building fee to Ashley R Taylor and Bradley Taylor, 1434 Sherburne Ave, St. Paul, MN.

Union Park District Council would first like to express our appreciation for the efforts of several City staff members to find an appropriate process to address Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor's situation. We would also like to express our appreciation to Mai Vang, Legislative Hearing Coordinator, and Marcia Moermond, Legislative Hearing Officer, for their comprehensive review, and their efforts to find a resolution for this situation.

Here are 2 ways to think about 1350 Hague:

Version 1

- In 2018, one of the two structures located at 1350 Hague was demolished, and the remaining structure was entered into the Vacant Buildings program.
- The Vacant Building program requires an annual fee, which is due in October.
- On March 1, 2024, the remaining structure at 1350 Hague was removed from the Vacant Buildings program.

Version 2

- In May, 2023, two people purchased 1350 Hague Avenue and converted an unoccupied building on this off-the-beaten-path parcel into a new business (and they did it without a subsidy).

In 2023, Ashley Taylor and Bradley Taylor purchased 1350 Hague Avenue. During the closing (but not before), Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were informed by the seller that the building was in St. Paul's Vacant Building program and that the 2023 registration had been paid. The seller did not tell them that there are requirements to get the building removed from the Vacant Buildings program, and that there would be a yearly fee of \$5000 until it was removed from the Vacant Buildings program (perhaps because the seller did not fully understand the Vacant Buildings program).

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor immediately began working with the Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) to restore the building. Their understanding was that 1350 Hague was no longer vacant because they were actively restoring it.

Despite multiple interactions with DSI, no one asked Ms. Taylor nor Mr. Taylor if they understood St. Paul's Vacant Building program, if they understood that the building was still in the vacant buildings program despite the construction activity, if they knew the requirements to get the building removed from the Vacant Buildings

program, or if they knew that they would have to pay a yearly fee of \$4,918 until the building was removed from the Vacant Buildings program.

The first time that Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were informed that 1350 Hague Avenue was still in the Vacant Buildings program was the September 27, 2023 Vacant Building Registration Renewal Notice letter. Because Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were not familiar with the Vacant Buildings program and were not aware that their recently purchased property was still in the Vacant Buildings program, they followed the instructions in the letter:

“If you have questions about this registration fee or other vacant building requirements, please contact the District Inspector, Matt Dornfield, at 651-266-1902.”

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were told by DSI staff that the letter was a mistake, not to worry about the letter, and that no further action was needed on their part.

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor received additional letters from DSI. Each time they followed the instructions in the letter to pursue their questions, and each time DSI staff told them that the letter was a mistake, not to worry about the letter, the issue would be resolved, and that no further action was needed on their part.

Union Park District Council finds DSI’s failure to follow through (resolve the issue / remove the fee from the system) and failure to provide written follow up with Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor very distressing. For them, as for many small-and medium-sized business owners, DSI is the face of the City. DSI’s failure to follow through and follow up makes it much harder for St. Paul to attract new and retain existing businesses.

DSI failed to ask Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor:

- if they understood St. Paul’s Vacant Building program,
- if they understood that the building was still in the vacant buildings program despite the construction activity,
- if they knew the requirements to get the building removed from the Vacant Buildings program; and
- if they knew that they would have to pay a yearly fee of \$4,918 until the building was removed from the Vacant Buildings program,

Thus, Union Park District Council finds: 1. DSI’s interactions with Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor in response to each of the letters sent from DSI, and 2. DSI’s failure to ask Ms. Taylor or Mr. Taylor the four (4) essential points of clarification (above), sufficient justification for a full refund of the Vacant Buildings program registration fee effective immediately.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dvorak
Union Park District Council President

Addendum #1 Timeline

2018 1350 Hague Avenue had 2 structures.

- One of the two structures was demolished,
- and the remaining structure was registered in the Vacant Buildings program

2022 Work “done without a Code Compliance and it was red tagged in December 2022.”

2023 Ashley Taylor and Bradley Taylor purchase 1350 Hague

May, 2023 Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor close on 1350 Hague Avenue.

During the closing (but not before), they were informed by the seller (Patrick) that 1350 Hague was in St. Paul's Vacant Building program and that the 2023 registration had been paid.

The seller did not tell Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor that there are requirements that 1350 Hague Avenue would have to meet in order to get removed from the Vacant Buildings program, and that there would be a yearly fee of \$5000 until 1350 Hague was removed from the Vacant Buildings program.

It was Ms. Taylor's and Mr. Taylor's understanding that 1350 Hague Avenue was no longer vacant because they would immediately begin renovations.

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor immediately began working with the Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) to restore the building. Despite multiple interactions with DSI, no one asked Ms. Taylor or Mr. Taylor if they understood St. Paul's Vacant Building program, if they understood that 1350 Hague Avenue was still in the vacant buildings program despite the construction activity, if they knew the requirements to get 1350 Hague removed from the Vacant Buildings program, or if they knew that they would have to pay a yearly fee of \$4,918 until 1350 Hague was removed from the Vacant Buildings program.

September 27, 2023 Vacant Building Registration Renewal Notice

from Steve Magner, Manager of Code Enforcement, also identified as the Vacant Buildings Program Manager, Department of Safety and Inspections,

to Patricia Schacherer, 451 Wilson Street NE, Minneapolis, MN,

also sent to Ashely R Taylor/Bradley Taylor, 1434 Sherburne Ave, St. Paul, MN:

"If you have questions about this registration fee or other vacant building requirements, please contact the District Inspector, Matt Dornfield, at 651-266-1902."

[UPDC comment #1: The Vacant building registration fee was for October 27, 2023 – October 27, 2024.]

[UPDC comment #2: The letter does not state whether 1350 Hague Avenue is a Category 1, Category 2, or Category 3 Vacant Building.

(Based on the fee, one could infer that it was a Category 2 or Category 3 Vacant Building.)]

[UPDC comment #3: It was not until this letter that Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were informed that 1350 Hague Avenue was still in the Vacant Buildings program. At no time did anyone explain the requirements to get 1350 Hague Avenue removed from the Vacant Buildings program.

Because Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were not familiar with the Vacant Buildings program and were not aware that their recently purchased property was still in the Vacant Buildings program, they followed the instructions in the letter:

"If you have questions about this registration fee or other vacant building requirements, please contact the District Inspector, Matt Dornfield, at 651-266-1902."

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were told by DSI staff that the letter was a mistake, not to worry about the letter, and that no further action was needed on their part.]

October 27, 2023 Vacant Building Registration Fee Warning Letter

from Steve Magner, Manager of Code Enforcement, also identified as the Vacant Buildings Program Manager, Department of Safety and Inspections,

to Patricia Schacherer, 451 Wilson Street NE, Minneapolis, MN,

also sent to Ashely R Taylor/Bradley Taylor, 1434 Sherburne Ave, St. Paul, MN:

“If you have questions about this registration fee or other vacant building requirements, please contact the Enforcement Officer, Matt Dornfield, at 651-266- 1902.”

[UPDC comment #1: Because Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor had been told that the September letter was a mistake and that no further action was needed on their part, they followed the instructions in the letter:

“If you have questions about this registration fee or other vacant building requirements, please contact the Enforcement Officer, Matt Dornfield, at 651-266- 1902.”

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Taylor were again told by DSI staff that the letter was a mistake, not to worry about the letter, and that no further action was needed on their part.]

March 1, 2024 DSI removed 1350 Hague from the Vacant Buildings program.

May 19, 2025 email from Bradley Taylor to Legislative Hearings Officer stated:

“We purchased the building in May 2023 and immediately filed for sewer permit, building permit, plumbing permit, gas permit, etc. Shortly afterward we began receiving letters regarding a vacant building fee. We were very concerned since it was for a large dollar amount, so we reached out multiple times to DSI — via phone, text, and even in person — and were repeatedly told it was a mistake. We were advised not to worry about the letters and that no further action was needed on our part. At no point were we informed that we needed to formally appeal or take additional steps.”
“I even visited the DSI office in person for clarity, where I was again told the issue would be resolved and to ignore the notices.”

June 10, 2025 Legislative Hearing

Present: Marcia Moermond, Legislative Hearing Officer
James Hoffman, Supervisor, Department of Safety and Inspections
Ashley Taylor (by phone)
Bradley Taylor

Ashley Taylor: “We called every time we got a letter or notice. We received the same answer every time we contacted someone.”

“Our confusion is we called multiple Vacant Building inspectors in 2023, what could we have done differently when we feel we were proactive about being in the Vacant Building program and being told it was a mistake.”

July 15, 2025 Legislative Hearing

Present: Marcia Moermond, Legislative Hearing Officer
Ashley Taylor (by phone)
Bradley Taylor

August 6, 2025 City Council public hearing