

*Eric Celeste*

1993 Lincoln Avenue Saint Paul, MN 55105

RECEIVED

MAR 20 2012

COUNCILMEMBER  
KATHY LANTRY

19 March 2012  
Kathy Lantry  
320-C City Hall  
15 Kellogg Blvd., West  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Council President Lantry,

On Wednesday Saint Paul City Council will hold a hearing on the changes to Area 21 permit parking. I am a resident of Area 21 and have helped neighbors find their way through the process of changing and extending Area 21 permit parking. My neighbor, Sara Mountain, initiated the process and carried the permit around the neighborhood last year. Her idea was unique: in order to mitigate the negative impact of permit parking on our neighborhood, and recognizing that the parking issue here is clearly University of Saint Thomas students and staff, she proposed a school-year, 8am-5pm permit instead of the typical year-round 8am-8pm permit.

We have followed a City mandated process to the letter. This process is the one that has been in use in the City for a couple of decades and in situations all over the city where parking relief has been needed. Sara and neighbors approached our Mac Groveland neighborhood council with our concerns in January 2011 and learned the procedure from Elizabeth Stiffler who was present at that meeting of the transportation committee. After working with the city to create an appropriate petition, Sara canvassed the neighborhood. Because our petition changes the terms of Area 21 permits, Sara had to knock on the door of every resident who already had permit parking in the area as well as the doors of the half block of Lincoln Avenue which we proposed be added to permit parking. The city provided those addresses and required 60% approval. The petition got over 66% support. Only 16% refused to sign (the rest could not be reached).

In February 2012 the Mac Groveland Community Council approved our petition and forwarded it to City Council. However, there were some neighbors from outside the petition area, particularly the block of Lincoln between Prior and Howell, who raised objections, so I want to make sure you understand why we bring this petition to you and ask for your support.

We are experiencing a University of Saint Thomas problem associated with bringing more commuters into the area than are able or willing to park at UST. While UST is in compliance with City Ordinance for parking spaces, we are seeing that their students and staff prefer free parking on our streets to paid parking in their lots. Over the past couple years this problem has become particularly severe and neighbors on Lincoln Avenue between Cleveland and Prior are following the only path of recourse that exists, permit parking. If you look at a map of permit parking in Saint Paul it becomes clear that our neighborhood is an exception to the otherwise solid ring of permit parking around UST. While none of us are fans of permit parking, we are at the breaking point and permit parking is the only way to regain some measure of safety and tranquility for our streets.

We recognize that permit parking is a last recourse and it is a sign of how desperate neighbors feel about the situation that they have supported a permit parking petition so overwhelmingly. One of the reasons for this support is the compromise that Sara Mountain crafted. The fact that the new permit will only be in force during the school year (September 1 through April 30) means that parking will be free and open all summer long, a time when families often invite guests and kids have friends over. We have not had any trouble with summertime parking, a clear indication of the relationship of our issue with UST's calendar. The fact that the new permit will allow free and open parking in the evenings (enforcement ends at 5pm rather than 8pm) means that dinner guests will be able to share our homes and tables without requiring visitor passes. The desire to reduce the need for visitor passes was a big part of why this petition succeeded so well among residents who already have permit parking in Area 21.

Some of the opponents of this petition have complained that we are being bad neighbors by closing our streets off to outsiders who need parking in a thriving city environment. In fact, even if we factor in the extension this petition requests to complete permit parking on the superblock of Lincoln between Cleveland and Prior, the reduced days and hours of enforcement will result in a one-third reduction in permit parking overall. In other words, by supporting this petition you will be reducing the amount of permit parking in Area 21, reducing the costs of enforcement, and satisfying the desires of over two-thirds of the residents who signed in support of this request.

This is an initiative to fine tune and minimize the undesired side effects of UST traffic while preserving the residential character of our streets in Mac Groveland. We love our neighborhood, we love our neighbors (including Saint Thomas), but we recognize the need for some balance in the equation.

Some of the objections from those outside the petition area have stemmed from the fear that by introducing permit parking on the remainder of the Cleveland/Prior block of Lincoln we may "push" the UST parking problem eastward to the Prior/Howell block of Lincoln. While it is impossible to say whether this is, in fact, how things would play out, I think this is a fairly reasonable concern. I would point out that this permit petition process is open to every block and every neighborhood, by supporting this petition you indicate to these neighbors that you respect the process the city has put in place and welcome others to make use of this tool. What we have done this past year is set a precedent for a permit with reduced enforcement that should both save the city enforcement dollars while making it easier to gain the support of neighbors.

This is an initiative to fine tune and minimize the undesired side effects of UST traffic while preserving the residential character of our streets in Mac Groveland. We love our neighborhood, we love our neighbors (including Saint Thomas), but we recognize the need for some balance in the equation.

I look forward to your support this week, and welcome any questions you or your staff may have about this petition.

Sincerely yours,



Eric Celeste