

From: [Benner, Jerome B.](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul Contact-Council](#)
Subject: University of St. Thomas 2260 Summit Avenue Appeal File #: 24-039-050 Site Plan File #: 23-079-985
Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2024 2:35:33 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[Letter to Council Site Plan Appeal JBII 6.6.24.pdf](#)

Hello,

Please see the attached letter from Jerome Benner on behalf of the University of St. Thomas.

Thank you,

Jerome

Jerome Benner
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Dear Council President Jalali and City Councilmembers:

On behalf of the University of St. Thomas, I am writing to provide you with an update on our community engagement efforts as part of the proposed Lee and Penny Anderson Arena development. For those of you who don't me, my name is Jerome Benner and I serve as the Director of Neighborhood and Community Relations for the University of St. Thomas. My role is to help build relationships in the neighborhood with residents, represent the university in areas where St. Thomas has an impact in the community, and create meaningful opportunities for neighbors to experience the St. Thomas campus.

While your review of the approved site plan is focused on the more technical aspects of the arena development, we know that community engagement is an important part of the process. I would like to share with you our engagement efforts to date.

Over the past several months, we have undertaken extensive efforts to engage with residents in the Union Park and Macalester Groveland neighborhoods. We understand the importance of ensuring that the voices of our residents are heard and considered throughout the planning and construction processes. As such, we have implemented a variety of methods to facilitate meaningful dialogue and solicit feedback.

Informational Meetings

As with all development projects, it is important to share project details with community members to help set expectations and understand the implications of the project on the existing community. Our primary goal has always been to engage early and often, which is why within a month of the historic announcement regarding the contribution from Lee and Penny Anderson in December of 2023, St. Thomas and the project development staff hosted a meeting with the Macalester Groveland Community Council – Housing and Land Use Committee (MGCC HLU). The project team also visited the Union Park District Council – Community Land Use and Economic Development Committee (CLUED), and the West Summit Neighborhood Advisory Council (WSNAC) in the following weeks. These three organizations helped us build awareness of the project and foster conversations in the community.

The goal of the informational meetings was to provide project overviews and take questions from the community. Throughout the process we've shared project milestones, design updates, programming elements, and hosted an open house in partnership with City staff to discuss the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) and how the community can provide written comments to the Environmental Quality Board. We also hosted a Town Hall meeting on campus to garner support for the arena and unveil project design elements.

While there are a few neighbors who are very opposed to the arena, there are several others who are neutral, supportive or excited about the arena and the economic vitality that the arena and other St. Thomas projects bring to the neighborhood and the city.



Listening Sessions

We learned through our informational sessions that some community members were not feeling adequately heard at the meetings and wanted more time to share their thoughts. As a response to this feedback, St. Thomas partnered with WSNAC to host community listening sessions that prioritized hearing community voices and less on project details and milestones. We have found these meetings to be fruitful for our staff to understand where we need to focus our mitigation efforts.

Office Hours

Leading up to the City Council hearing, we wanted to ensure neighbors and interested parties had opportunities to make connections with our Neighborhood Relations team in a less public setting, so we hosted open office hours in our student center for people to share their thoughts and concerns.

Feedback into Project Adjustments

Through our conversations, we heard some productive ideas about ways to improve the project and lessen impacts on the surrounding community. The table below demonstrates where we adjusted the project design based on feedback shared from the neighbors.

Community Concerns	Project Design Adjustments
Concerns of spectators circling the neighborhood during large events to find parking	Tickets will be sold with assigned parking spaces; off-site parking and shuttle options for large events
Large trucks accessing the south campus from Summit Avenue	Added new southeast Cretin Avenue access point to design
Impact to tree canopy on campus	St. Thomas committed to exceeding a 1:1 tree replacement ratio.
South façade of the arena design facing Goodrich was too blank	Additional planting and stone details added to the south façade to provide a more pleasant aesthetic
Open lines of communication and early notice of large events	Website improvements to make information more accessible. Email notifications to neighborhood list re: large events will be implemented.
Various concerns about parking and traffic for large events	Creating a working group of neighbors as part of our event management plan, kicking off in August



Event Management Plan Working Group

St. Thomas has been asked to create an Event Management Plan (EMP) to manage parking and traffic demand for events held at the arena. Although the development of an EMP is a requirement of the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) mitigation and noted in the Site Plan approval as an outstanding condition, we have always planned to do so as we understand proper event management is important for our campus community and event attendees. This plan will be developed with the City of St. Paul Traffic Engineering Department and the St. Paul Police Dept.

We are working closely with the district councils to recruit members for the EMP Working Group. Additionally, we will prioritize community members that serve on their respective district council transportation committees as they are subject matter experts on transportation needs related to their communities.

There will be three in-person meetings and we will ask the working group members to submit a letter of recommendation on mitigation strategies that will be considered as the final deliverable that will be submitted to the City of St. Paul. We are looking forward to this collaborative process.

Thank you for your time, Council President, and Councilmembers. Our engagement efforts will not stop after a decision has been made, nor after the arena is built. We know there will be opportunities for continuous improvement and chances to deepen our connection with neighbors. We hope that you understand our commitment to engagement, and the greater St. Thomas community.

Sincerely,

Jerome Benner, Director of Neighborhood and Community Relations



Lee and Penny Anderson Arena: 2023-2024 Community Engagement Sessions

Neighborhood Group Key:

UPDC (CLUED) = Union Park District Council – Community Land Use and Economic Development

MGCC (HLU) = Macalester Groveland Community Council – Housing and Land Use

WSNAC = West Summit Neighborhood Advisory Council

Quarter 1: 2023 Community Engagement Meetings (Five Meetings)

January 25 – MGCC (HLU)

January 31 – WSNAC

February 13 – Town Hall Discussion hosted by St. Thomas on campus

February 27 – UPDC (CLUED)

Discussion Topics: Project Need, Project Overview, Q&A Sessions Hosted by Neighbors

Quarters 2 and 3: 2023 Community Engagement Meetings (Five Meetings)

March 14 – WSNAC

April 14 – WSNAC

June 5 – Town Hall Discussion

June 13 – WSNAC

July 12 – EAW Open House hosted by St. Thomas

July 18 – WSNAC

July 26 – MGCC (HLU)

Discussion Topics: Project Milestones, Arena Program Elements, Design Updates (Site & Building), EAW Open House

Quarter 4: 2023 Community Engagement Meetings (Five Meetings)

October 16 – UPDC (CLUED)

October 25 – MGCC (HLU)

November 21 – WSNAC

December 13 MGCC (HLU)

December 18 – UPDC (CLUED)

Discussion Topics: EAW Update, Entitlement Schedule, Design Update (Architectural and Landscape), Construction Schedule Updates



Quarter 1: 2024 Community Engagement Meetings (Three Meetings)

February 13 – WSNAC

April 23 – WSNAC

April 30 – WSNAC

Discussion Topics: Design Update (Seat Counts and Layout), Construction Update (Progress Photos & Milestones) Event Management Plan Update, Entitlement/Permitting Update, Community Listening Session

Quarters 2 and 3: 2024 Community Engagement Meetings (Five Meetings)

May 13 – UPDC Transportation Committee

May 28 – MGCC Transportation Committee

June 6 – Community Office Hours hosted by St. Thomas

June 11 – Community Office Hours hosted by St. Thomas

June 13 – Community Listening Session

Discussion Topics: Event Management Plan Working Group Recruitment, Community Listening Session, Community Office Hours

Total Number of meetings and engagement opportunities: 23