

Dear Councilmembers:

I am writing regarding agenda item #32 on your May 17, 2017 agenda “Denying the Application submitted by Jaunae Brooks on behalf of Railroader Printing Building located at 235 East Sixth Street for an exception to the general hours of operation for pedestrian Skyway Bridge #15.” I urge you to reject the staff report and approve Ms. Brooks’s request.

I am a tenant in Jaunae Brooks’ Railroader Printing Building at 235 E. 6th Street. My firm has been in this building for nearly a decade, and I have been with the firm for five years.

During that time, the increase in crime has been noticeable, and troubling. Specifically, my firm often receives notices of our alarm having been tripped, many times we have been greeted at the beginning of the work day by (presumably) transient people having passed out in the building lobby, we have seen many instances of trash-strewn refuse on the skyway level, and had to manage about 6 weeks’ worth of our building’s only elevator smelling of human urine during the months of February and March of this year. There are many, many other instances.

Of course, for each of these instances, we have kept our building owner apprised – most often she was already aware. Ms. Brooks has done whatever she could (within reason) to address the problem by working proactively with the City. Those efforts seemingly having failed, she took what we deem to be a very commonsense approach – she locked the doors.

We do not condone lawlessness, but in this situation, there is a solution that has effectively zero cost – to anyone – and thousands of dollars *per month* of benefit to the taxpayers of the city of St. Paul, the tenants of the building and its owners.

At Ms. Brooks’s request, I attended the March 31 Skyway Governance Advisory Committee, along with nearly every other tenant in our building – and a few adjoining buildings. We all attended to support Ms. Brooks’s request, and testified in favor of it – each of us citing personal stories of the horrendous state of affairs in our building prior to Ms. Brooks’s efforts to protect our property, public health and personal safety. Quite Frankly, that Committee conducted a sham session and in my judgment inadequately considered her request, given their advisory nature. They did not support their decision with any discernable logic, aside from an (understandable) aversion to creating precedent. The Committee frankly wasted my time, along with those of my fellow building owners, as it seemed that their decision had been made prior to the meeting. Members were rude and disrespectful to Ms. Brooks and to building owners, and appeared hamstrung by rules that they could neither cite nor describe. I urge the council to lend zero credence to the recommendation of the Advisory Committee.

However, the more appropriate course of action was and is to approve Ms. Brooks’s request on a temporary basis – while the City determines a more broadly applicable solution to its significant, and growing, skyway governance issues. This is a commonsense approach – the nature of our building is such that there is no reason for anyone to be in the skyway after 8PM who doesn’t live or work here – and we have been guaranteed access by Ms. Brooks. There is not a public cost – only public benefit.

I am a city councilmember myself, and when there is no reason to NOT do something, and a taxpayer is making the request, the answer is obvious – grant the request, perhaps with conditions.

Sincerely,
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