

27 July 2024

**To:** Saint Paul City Council – Public Hearing Packet  
**Cc:** Saint Paul City Council Member Kim (Ward 5)

**From:** East Como Neighbors (see names, addresses below)

**RE:** Comments on *Lakeside Guitar Festival - Minnesota's Last Waltz* Sound Level Variance Request

David Russ, Lakeside Guitar Festival - Minnesota's Last Waltz, has requested a sound level variance, for 105 dBA to present amplified sound with use of a sound system for events on August 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. The Saint Paul City Council will consider this request, along with community comments at a Public Hearing during their August 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### **Overall Comment**

The Department of Safety and Inspections has recommended the following conditions: 1) The Variance shall be for the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. on Friday, August 9, and Saturday, August 10, 2024 for a Lakeside Guitar Festival/Minnesota's Last Waltz event. 2) All electronically powered equipment used in conjunction with the event shall not exceed 90 dBA at 50 feet from any sound source on August 9, and August 10, 2024. 3) The applicant shall provide personnel and equipment to ensure compliance with the sound level variance conditions. 4) All electronically powered equipment, PA systems, loudspeakers or similar devices shall be turned off no later than 10:00 p.m. on August 9, and August 10, 2024.

**We support DSI's recommendations** and have additional concerns and clarifications for your consideration.

### **Additional Considerations**

- The City's requirements for sound level variance requests state that applications should be submitted at least 60 days in advance. This request does not meet that requirement, and as a result, the City's action on this request will come less than two days prior to the event.
- The application refers to the events taking place at the Como Lakeside Pavilion, however, it is not clear whether the sound level variance request is intended to apply to all the stages involved with the event. According to the event's website (<https://www.musicmissionmusic.com/lakeside-guitar-festival-2024>), music will be performed in several locations – the Promenade Stage, the Grand Lawn, the Waterfall Stage and inside at the Dock and Paddle. **If not already clear, we request DSI's recommendation apply to all three outdoor stages, including the Promenade Stage.**
- We appreciate this is a valuable community event, perhaps deserving of special considerations. However, we point out that the Como Pavilion hosts over 100 events each season and unlike

most other sound variance requests, we are impacted all season long. We have been gratified with the cooperation of Lancer and City Parks staff in minimizing our concerns, but sound level variances have an especially greater impact for us. In this case, there are musical events planned for 12 hours each day. While sound levels of 90 dBA (at 50-feet) might seem reasonable, for close neighbors such as us it impacts the peace and quiet of our homes and yards during a weekend. Of note:

- The Department of Parks has purchased and installed a new sound system to be used at the Promenade Stage, set for sound output limits at 85 dBA. This level seems reasonable – providing a balance between audience appreciation and neighborhood comfort.
- For perspective, 80 dBA has been represented (by the Department of Safety and Inspections) as “similar to a passing semi truck from a few feet away.” It seems reasonable that this sound level ought to be adequate for those enjoying any event. (Please note that 90 dBA is double the volume compared to 80 dBA, 100 dBA is double 90 dBA, etc.).
- For another perspective, some of us have noted that we can clearly hear lyrics of music events (in our yards) using the City’s sound system with the 85 dBA output limits. If we can hear it, the Pavilion audience certainly can as well.
- Sound levels at last year’s Last Waltz were recorded by Lancer staff at 110 dBA within the Promenade. This level is dangerous to the human ear after less than 2 minutes (<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2007-175/pdfs/2007-175.pdf>).
- Sound produced by musicians is not the only impact. Last year’s Last Waltz performance was followed by audience members boisterously reveling in the parking lot until 11 p.m. – audible in a number of our bedrooms with the windows shut. **We request the City direct event organizers to control after-event activities such as this.**

## Future Considerations

As the City considers sound level variance requests at the Como Pavilion, we request you take into consideration:

- The city has purchased a new sound system that is capable of controlling sound output while providing high-quality amplification for performers. City staff have determined that output levels of 85 dBA are appropriate, so the need for louder levels ought to be considered only in extraordinary circumstances.
- The Lakeside Guitar Festival - Minnesota's Last Waltz may be considered (by the City) to be a special community event. In the future, there may be other events of similar stature for your consideration. Given the numerous events already occurring at the Como Pavilion along with their cumulative, season-long impacts, allowing one such special event per season seems

reasonable. The City should develop and enforce criteria to determine how such a policy might be affected.

Respectfully submitted,

East Como Neighbors

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