

November 17, 2020

Mr. Jack Byers, Executive Director  
Payne Phalen Community Council  
567 Payne Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55130

RE: Response to the letter from Mr. Byers dated 11.16.2020 concerning the HOPE Community Academy Charter School Lease Revenue Bonds

Dear Mr. Byers,

Please accept this letter as HOPE Community Academy's (HOPE) formal response to your letter referenced above. First, we want to thank you for communicating the concerns of the Community and for allowing HOPE to address those concerns. It is precisely because of the potential for misunderstanding and misinformation that HOPE chose not to make any of its information public until we could submit it to the Payne-Phalen Community Council (PPCC) and follow the community engagement process defined by PPCC.

HOPE has been at 720 Payne for over 20 years and plans to be an asset to the Community well into the future. We have been an active participant in community events and believe that we have been a good steward of the asset that is both beneficial and necessary for the Payne-Phalen Community.

As a point of clarification, you stated in your letter that you **"...only received current drawings on this project last Tuesday, November 10<sup>th</sup>!..."** This statement is not necessarily accurate. Below is the sequence of communication that I have had with you since the middle of October 2020.

- 10.12.2020: First inquiry made to PPCC concerning the HOPE project.
- **10.13.2020: I emailed the design (same as the one submitted to St. Paul DSI and PED) to you for your review and discussion. (Attachment A)**
- 10.16.2020: You sent me an email but I did not receive it.
- 10.26.2020: I followed up with you for an update, at which time you re-sent your 10.16.2020 email.
- 10.27.2020: I set up a virtual meeting to discuss your questions.
- **10.29.2020: I had a virtual meeting with you and Justin (from my office) to review the plans that were forwarded to you on 10.13.2020 and to respond to the questions that you outlined in your 10.16.2020 email.**
- **11.10.2020: I re-sent you the same plans that I sent you on 10.13.2020.**
- 11.12.2020: I emailed you requesting a time to catch up and update each other.
- 11.16.2020: I emailed you HOPE's parking calculation and analysis.

You have had the drawings that HOPE submitted to DSI and PED since October 13, 2020.

I would like to take this opportunity to address some of the specific concerns that you outlined in your letter. To reference each, I will title them as you did in your letter.

***On the matter of financial tools and investments:*** As I mentioned to you in our conversation, there was discussion at a previous HRA meeting on the potential of putting a moratorium on Charter School Bonds; however, the decision on a moratorium has been postponed until early March of 2021 when PED completes its analysis, per the direction and scope of the HRA. After the HRA reviews this analysis, a final decision will be made. I believe Councilmember Jane Prince left you a voicemail on the evening of 11.16.2020 addressing this issue already. These concerns do not necessarily involve HOPE, and the Community's concerns should be addressed directly to the elected officials.

***Demolition of housing and creation of a new surface parking lot in the residential neighborhood:*** HOPE was requesting a letter of support from PPCC on this issue. As you can see from my October 13, 2020 email, I specifically wanted to review the parking variance request and specifically asked for support from PPCC. We discussed this issue during our October 29, 2020 virtual meeting.

HOPE does not want to build more parking than is needed. However, the City of St. Paul has code requirements for the number of stalls depending on certain factors. Currently HOPE has 70 stalls but with the addition we will lose about 24 of them. One proposal is to replace the loss of parking with a 27-stall parking area on the two residential lots.

From a functionality perspective, after the addition is built, there will be 47 stalls in the existing parking lot at 720 Payne. However, on Beaumont and Drewry can accommodate, there are 36 on-street parking stalls (*Attachment B*) bringing the total to 83 stalls that could be available without the new parking lot. This would be sufficient to meet HOPE's parking needs. If HOPE does not provide for the code required number of parking stalls on its property, then a parking variance is required. This is the same parking variance request that HOPE was seeking support from PPCC per previous conversations. If PPCC can support this, there would NOT be a need for the new parking lot. We are in the process of finalizing the exact parking variance count with the Department of Safety and Inspection (DSI) through their Site Plan Review process.

HOPE feels that the 83 stalls is sufficient because HOPE is a community school that draws from the surrounding neighborhoods. HOPE busses 94% of its student population on a daily basis and projects that this percentage will remain unchanged with the expanded grade levels. Due to this, the increase in traffic will consist of a couple more busses and some additional staff members.

***Conflict with adopted land use and transportation policy and conflict with adopted sustainability, resilience, and transportation policy:*** HOPE is in full support of more public transportation options on the east side of St. Paul and feels that it would be beneficial to HOPE's staff and high school students to have the Rush Line BRT. This is one more reason why HOPE feels that PPCC should support the parking variance that HOPE is requesting.

**Conflicts with adopted water-quality policy:** Swede Hollow Park is an important resource to the Community and to HOPE. That is why HOPE is working with the City of St. Paul and the Capital Region Watershed District (CRWD) on finalizing design to install an above ground and an underground stormwater management system that will collect stormwater run-off from the surface parking lots and buildings and store it for controlled release into the ground, as well as into the City's stormwater system. We are also working with a geotechnical consultant to ensure that the proposed systems are stable and will not impact the slopes down to Swede Hollow. These systems are being reviewed by both the City of St. Paul and the CRWD for strict compliance with all requirements.

**Incomplete information on transportation impacts:** HOPE feels that the 83 stalls will be sufficient because HOPE is a community school that draws from the surrounding neighborhoods. HOPE busses 94% of its student population on a daily basis and projects that this percentage will remain unchanged with the expanded grade level. Due to this, the increase in traffic will consist of a couple more busses and some additional staff members.

The traffic circulation will be the same as it is currently. All traffic will enter from the north through Minnehaha and head south to Drewry. Bus staging will occur in the HOPE parking lot for both the loading and unloading of students. Upon completion, busses will exit onto Drewry and head west along Beaumont to Payne. Once at Payne, traffic will have the option to go north or south towards their final destinations.

HOPE does not anticipate that traffic staging and patterns will be altered from the current flow. Please let us know what other information you may need and we will forward that to you.

Mr. Byers, on a couple of general comments, PPCC's concerns about the City's engagement process is not something HOPE can comment on. We follow the protocols set up by the different City departments that we interact with as a project moves through the approval process, and we engage other stakeholders as deemed necessary.

As City staff may have mentioned, we have recently submitted an application to the HRA for financing / bonding approvals. This process is separate than the Site Plan review and variance request process. As we had discussed on our call, it was our intent to engage with you at an upcoming Community meeting to present the proposed site plan and to discuss the potential parking variance.

HOPE is well aware of the potential for misunderstanding and misinformation. That is precisely why we DID NOT make any of our project information public nor did we engage the Community in an official manner until we had submitted our project to PPCC for review. We understand that PPCC has a community engagement process and we did not want to circumvent it. We will cooperate and participate with PPCC in any way that you feel is beneficial in getting the information to the Community.

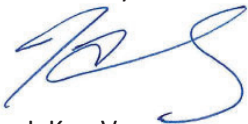
In conclusion, we appreciate your final statement acknowledging HOPE as a valued member of the Community and for valuing HOPE's contribution to the Community. Hope works very hard at be a part of this wonderful community and makes sure we always find a way to partner with the community. Since our founding, HOPE has partner with the following organizations and projects:

- East Side Arts Council – Artists in Residency Program
- Railroad Island Neighborhood holds its monthly Board meetings and community events at HOPE
- HOPE sponsors 3 Boy Scouts Troops and supports them with facility usage
- Partners with Lower Phalen Creek Project on preservation of Swede Hollow Park
- Partners with Friends of Swede Hollow on Arts in the Hollow Event and host Park Clean up
- Open gym for local neighborhood groups
- Partner with East Side Tutoring Center of Tutoring services as will continue the partnership for the Pre-Kindergarten Program.

Thank you for giving us an opportunity to address your concerns and we stand ready to actively engage the Community under your leadership as we move this project forward.

If you should have any additional concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 651.491.1970 or [jkvang@jbvang.com](mailto:jkvang@jbvang.com).

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Kou Vang".

J. Kou Vang  
Representative for HOPE Community Academy

cc: Commissioner Chris Tolbert, Chair, St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority  
Council President Amy Brendmoen, Ward 5  
Councilmember Nelsie Yang, Ward 6  
Councilmember Jane Prince, Ward 5  
Maychy Vu, Executive Director of HOPE Community Academy  
Nicolle Goodman, Director, Planning and Economic Development  
Jenny Wolfe, Planning and Economic Development  
Bill Demody, Planning and Economic Development  
Cheeneng Yang, Parks and Recreation Department  
Damian Schaab, Co-Chair Railroad Island Neighborhood Group  
Don Lorr, Co-Chair Railroad Island Neighborhood Group  
Athena Hollins, Board President  
PCC Executive Committee

# ATTACHMENT A

**From:** [J. Kou Vang](#)  
**To:** [Jack Byers](#)  
**Cc:** [J. Kou Vang](#)  
**Subject:** RE: HOPE Community Academy  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 13, 2020 8:32:08 PM  
**Attachments:** [20200623 HOPE SPR Drawing Set FINAL.pdf](#)

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Jack,

Attached is the set of drawings that we submitted to DSI with the Site Plan Review Application. The site plan has a couple of conditions that DSI would like us to change and re-submit. We are working on that re-submission.

I would like to review the following with you:

- Drawings
- Parking Variance
- Swede Hollow Tunnel

We would like to request the District Council to support the following:

- Parking Variance
- City of St. Paul HRA's issuance of the Conduit Bonds

In terms of time line, we are working with the following:

- HRA Conduit bond hearing (First Reading) – November 18, 2020
- HRA Conduit bond approval – December 9, 2020
- Bond closing Early January 2021
- Start construction end of January 2021
- Completion of first floor for occupancy – August 15, 2021
- Completion of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors for occupancy – December 31, 2021

Jack, thank you for your time and I look forward to talking with you soon.

**J. KOU VANG** | *President*

Direct: 651.294.3505 | Mobile: 651.491.1970 | [jkvang@jbvang.com](mailto:jkvang@jbvang.com)



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**From:** Jack Byers <JackB@paynephalen.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 12, 2020 5:37 PM  
**To:** J. Kou Vang <jkvang@jbvang.com>  
**Subject:** RE: HOPE Community Academy

Yes, Of course. Happy to hear from you again, Kou.

Can you please send me some project information to review – plans, timeline, etc. – so that I can take a look and catch up?

Thanks in advance,

Jack

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**Jack Byers**  
Executive Director

**Payne Phalen Community Council**  
567 Payne Ave, Saint Paul, MN 55130

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Mobile: (651) 724-7647  
[jackbyers@paynephalen.org](mailto:jackbyers@paynephalen.org)

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**From:** J. Kou Vang <[jkvang@jbvang.com](mailto:jkvang@jbvang.com)>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 12, 2020 2:28 PM  
**To:** Jack Byers <[JackB@paynephalen.org](mailto:JackB@paynephalen.org)>  
**Cc:** J. Kou Vang <[jkvang@jbvang.com](mailto:jkvang@jbvang.com)>  
**Subject:** HOPE Community Academy

Mr. Byers,

I am not sure if you remember me, but we met when I was working on the Community of Peace Academy building expansion.

I am now working on the HOPE Community Academy expansion project and would like to discuss this plan with you for your comments. We would like to request a support letter from your organization as we proceed with the project.

If possible, please give me a couple of dates of times that we can meet virtually.

Thank you for your consideration...

**J. KOU VANG** | *President*

Direct: 651.294.3505 | Mobile: 651.491.1970 | [jkvang@jbvang.com](mailto:jkvang@jbvang.com)



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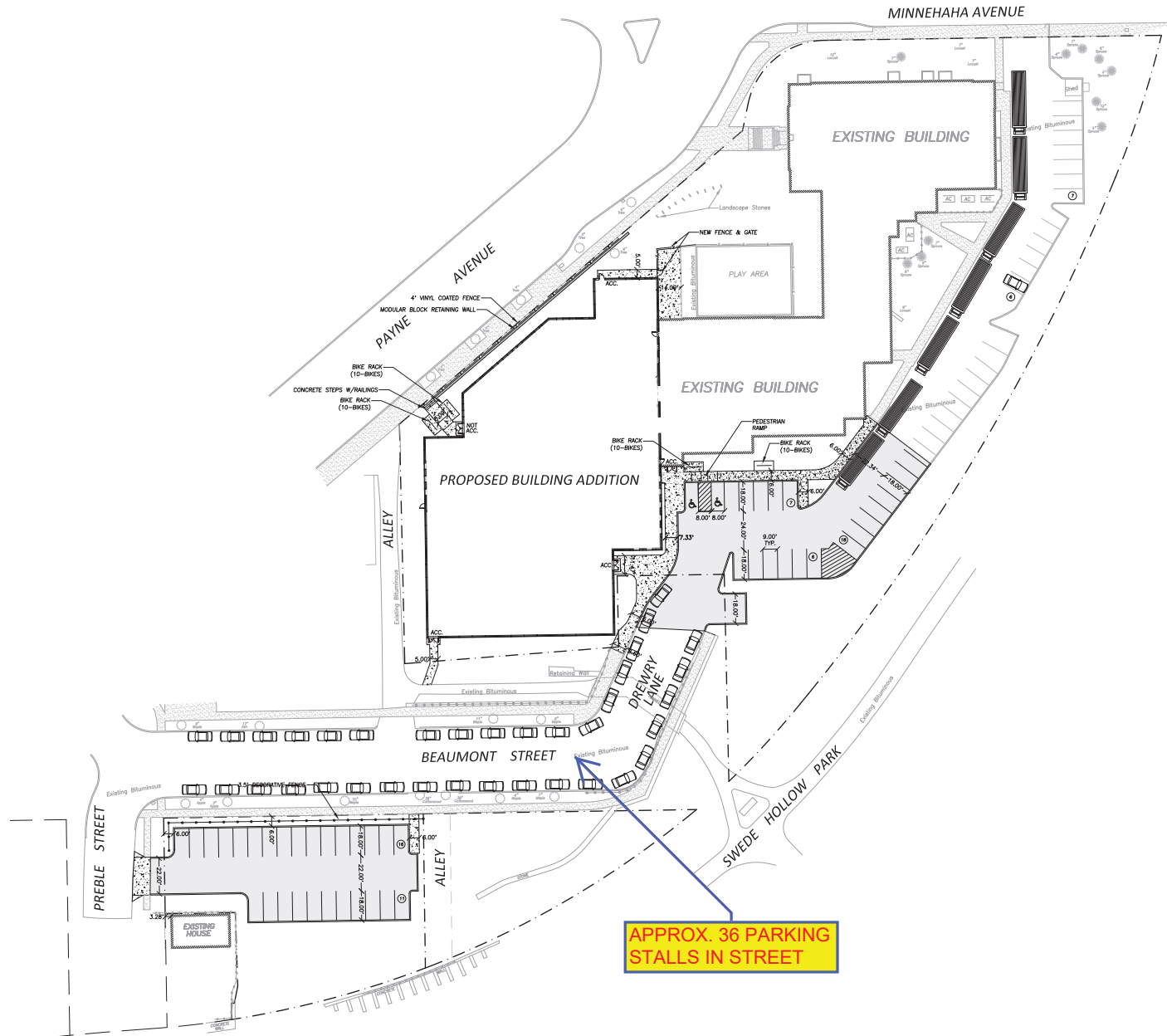
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# ATTACHMENT B



**APPROX. 36 PARKING STALLS IN STREET**