

**From:** [Marcia Avner](#)  
**To:** [CouncilHearing \(CI-StPaul\)](#)  
**Subject:** Comments for City Council Meeting on June 28, 2023  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 27, 2023 11:20:39 AM  
**Attachments:** [Comments Respectfully Submitted to the St Paul City Council.docx](#)

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Comments Respectfully Submitted to the St Paul City Council

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Chair Brendmoen and Members of the St Paul City Council, I am sharing my concerns about the proposal from the University of St Thomas for baseball, softball, parking, and practice facilities and key impacts of that proposal on our neighborhood and the city.

**Background:**

The City of St Paul's Highland Bridge project, ten plus years in the planning, now being built, continues at this late date (June 27, 2023) to present two possibilities to the city: 1) a solid, forward looking, and contributing addition to St Paul and its residents, OR 2) a traffic-clogging, neighborhood-destroying problem for the city that will present intractable challenges into the future.

Why did this happen?

From the perspective of those of us in the neighborhood closest to Highland Bridge, big time sports happened. St. Thomas wanted to join the NCAA's Division 1. By chance, the Chair of the UST Board was also the chair of the site's developer at the time of the proposal to expand sports fields. Very late in the process, when the Master Plan had been deliberated and accepted, new proposals were made and many variances granted without there being a whole, big picture view of the site.

**Now there are a lot of unanswered questions as the proposal comes before the City Council. PLEASE ask a lot of questions and ask for answers before you approve the UST proposal.**

- 1) **Traffic.** As the Highland Bridge project grows, the area at Cleveland and Montreal is already experiencing traffic increases at that intersection as well as surrounding streets. The Cleveland and Ford Parkway intersection gets some of the impact already. While the increase in this early stage of development is tolerable, I urge you to drive to the intersection and see how congested it gets, especially during a "rush hour" or around Little League games. Final development stages at Highland Bridge project as many as 10,000 residents. Imagine the traffic and safety impacts.

**Given the proposal before you, my concerns focus first on: Lack of adequate information about projected traffic and parking impacts.**

- The surface lot proposed will be controlled by the Zoning Code. What we don't know is whether St Thomas will charge for parking and thus drive the parking to the neighborhood.

- What will the impact be of additional cars on the neighborhood as well as increased use of bikes and foot traffic. This applies to game days, practice days, and times when the venue is rented to other events.
- We don't know how that parking will be used on non-game days. Will it be adequate when the space is rented?
- Will Little League continue to be welcome at the site and get free parking?
- We don't have formal assurance for which UST can be held accountable that they will shuttle students and fans from the campus.
- We don't know the role of the City in providing security and other services at the parking or other components of the proposed site.

I urge the Council to require a full parking and traffic impact assessment combining professionally forecast realistic projections that addresses this aspect of the proposal in clear and complete ways. This should include the combined impact from Highland Bridge and the proposed UST fields.

**2) Unknown anticipated full use of the proposed site:** Many in our neighborhood are concerned about light and noise (bright lights at 90 feet will impact the neighborhood! That variance has been granted) as well as foot traffic and student and fan behavior. Much of the concern that I have is about the expanded use of the proposed site for events in addition to UST baseball and softball games.

- To whom will UST rent the site? Concerts? Festivals? And how will the noise and light standards be applied and enforced?
- UST has promised community use of the site but we are already hearing about costs and limits for that. There is no clarity on this issue and the developers dodge the questions regularly.
- Who is responsible for security at the site for all events as well as when the site is not in use. It may be a perfect place to invite loitering.
- How will UST students and fans, already suffering with a bad reputation for being disrespectful of neighbors and private property, be held responsible for acceptable behavior.

**I urge the Council to get more complete information about these and other issues. That you are being asked to approve proposals without their being fully contextualized in the overall development at Highland Bridge and the multiple use of proposed UST fields is an insult to you and to those of us who will experience the impact of development. Our good neighborhood is being changed and will be changed by the development. Don't make it impossible for us to experience a good quality of life in Highland Park and in St Paul.**

**Please insist on comprehensive understanding of the full proposal and all its impacts.**

**From:** [Diane Sprague](#)  
**To:** [CouncilHearing \(CI-StPaul\)](#)  
**Subject:** Comments on the St. Thomas-Ryan Highland Bridge proposal  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 27, 2023 12:23:19 PM

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June 27, 2023

To the St. Paul City Council -

I am submitting these comments about the University of St. Thomas (UST)/Ryan Companies athletic facilities' proposal. I live very close to the south end of Highland Bridge, and have been opposed to the project since it was announced. Its lights, noise, traffic and possible parking problems will have extremely negative impacts both within Highland Bridge and in the immediate vicinity. It's inappropriate to have a private, religious organization controlling part of this major development. It's also inappropriate that the Council is being asked to give approval when some of the proposal specifics have not been finalized.

Neighbors and I truly wish we could derail the project's consideration, but it was evident early on that we would have little ability to counter the push for approval. In accepting that, we raise the following issues for attention.

**Parking and Traffic.** Ryan and UST have proposed six amendments to the development's Master Plan to enable work to continue on the proposal. The Planning Commission on May 26, 2023, vetoed the amendment requesting that civic and institutional uses be exempted from the maximum 20 spaces otherwise permitted in the F6 Gateway district. Neighbors and I advocate approval of all six.

If a request for surface parking is not approved, the project would have to provide any balance of spaces in a parking ramp (up to the Zoning Code maximum as determined by the Zoning Administrator from a site plan review). UST/Ryan have indicated that a ramp would be installed at a later date, depending on how demand evolves, and possibly in coordination with parking needed for the office/commercial space on the corner of Montreal and Cleveland Aves.

Delaying would also provide flexibility for locating/relocating a future corridor of walking/biking paths and other transit options on the property's east side. Opportunities here are evolving - it's possible, for example, that a transit service might make use of the parking.

The issue of promoting shuttles, public transit and similar uses was raised in the Planning Commission May 26th meeting. This would be desirable, because it could reduce traffic and congestion in the neighborhood and at the site - traffic at the Montreal and Cleveland Avenue and Montreal and St. Paul Ave. intersections already back up at a number of times during the day; the UST facilities will only exacerbate this. Council should make it a condition that UST formally commit to promoting car alternatives (perhaps providing incentives) at least among students and those accompanying them to games.

At present, there is no clear information on how much UST would charge for parking, and in what circumstances. Council should have this information in reviewing the proposal if there is the potential that a portion of those coming to events wouldn't use the parking. Our area already has many residents - particularly renters - who use on-street parking, and this would greatly increase street congestion problems.

**Facilities' alternate uses.** It has been indicated that UST is working out an agreement with the Parks and Recreation Dept. on what uses would be allowed at the site when not used by the university. This issue was raised in community meetings, and we had no idea back then about uses and if there would be security

requirements. We both have no idea now plus it appears no opportunity to comment on the contents. Council may not know these details, either.

A "Ford Site Parks Advisory Committee" operated during an earlier stage of Highland Bridge development. This group involved Ryan, city Parks and Recreation, and a number of community members. It made recommendations on possible activities for various park areas that Council approved in a resolution. It serves as a precedent for neighbors to advocate for requiring UST and Parks/Recreation to have at least one community meeting on the draft agreement so we know its details and can provide input.

**Lights and sound.** These are additional concerns that many in the neighborhood raised over time. Regarding lighting, it's been indicated that poles as tall as 90' will be installed. This almost certainly will glare all over not only the immediate site, but particularly to the residential streets immediate adjacent to the southern boundary of the project.

Regarding sound, crowd and loudspeaker noise will carry and blanket not only a good part of Highland Bridge, but in all directions of the neighborhood whenever ballgames are held. We additionally have no idea at present what level of noise will occur from alternate uses the UST/Parks and Recreation draft agreement permits, and if anyone in these organizations will be required to monitor/respond if there are excesses.

Nothing likely can be done, but it should be pointed out that the ball fields will be located only a few feet from where two affordable housing buildings are proposed - a typical but unfortunate way those with modest incomes are often treated. Additionally, many other residential buildings will be constructed extremely close to the fields at the south end of Highland Bridge. Proximity to the fields will significantly compromise residential quality at all these properties.

A further impact involves residences immediately south of Highland Bridge. A strip of land - about 15' to 20' deep - on a bluff at the very north edge of the neighborhood contains trees and bushes. For decades, it's been a buffer blocking views of the rail connections, the Ford Plant, and now Highland Bridge. Residents there have repeatedly explored keeping that growth to continue buffering the view and sound/lights.

UST has had discussions with those neighbors where the impression has been that the berm might be either preserved or alternate vegetation provided. However, if recent site plans along the southern property line are followed, it appears the berm would be totally removed - no depth for growths or plantings - and a retaining wall installed. Neighbors and I advocate that Council encourage UST to provide some depth of buffer land, preserving current growth as much as possible.

The UST/Ryan facilities' proposal will have a significant impact on those of us in the neighborhood around Highland Bridge, so thank you for the opportunity to submit these issues about it for City Council's review and action.

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