

Dear Distinguished Member of the St. Paul City Council,

I am writing on behalf of Fasika Ethiopia Restaurant at 510 N Snelling Avenue. Since opening its doors twelve years ago, Fasika has been a positive influence in the African community and the neighborhood within which it is located.

As a result of the increased foot traffic generated by the restaurant, other businesses such as Piazza, Addis Market, Sunshine Hair Salon, Randabo Café, Wow Fashion, and Dahabshell Hallal Market have opened. Thus, generating increase revenue for the City of St. Paul and increasing the property value of homes and business in the area.

On December 27, 2013, Fasika received a visit from a City official explaining that the building (506, 508 and 510 North Snelling) would soon be vacated. This came as a surprise as none of the owners were aware of the issue raised by the City official.

We are deeply disappointed in the landlord's actions as he has been dishonest with all parties involved. We viewed the video footage of the last City Council meeting in which Mr. Ogamien testified in regards to this issue. Since we did not have an opportunity to share our thoughts on this matter, we wanted to take this opportunity to clarify some of the things said. Please see our responses below.

Response to accusations of Fasika refusing to correct deficiencies:

- Fasika Ethiopian Restaurant was never told of any issues raised by the City of St. Paul and did not in any way refuse to correct any deficiencies highlighted. We would not threaten the viability of our business and our employees and their families. Moreover, our customers have become part of our family. For some, this is the only place they feel home. For example, each week families who have adopted Ethiopian children meet for lunch. These families see Fasika as an avenue to connect their children to their Ethiopian roots. Over the years, we have been blessed to establish a community of loyal customers and would never threaten taking the one place they called home away from them.

Response to accusation of Fasika calling police numerous times:

- Fasika Ethiopian Restaurant has called the police on 5 separate occasions. Three of these instances were related to health issues of customers inside the restaurant, where an ambulance was called. The other two instances were related to Mr. Ogamien's actions. The first, Mr. Ogamien had a party on the second floor and water started gushing into the restaurant bar area from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. The restaurant owner alerted Mr. Ogamien that there was a water issue and it needed to be fixed immediately as there were customers inside the restaurant. Mr. Ogamien refused to correct the issue. Since this was a health hazard for customers, the restaurant owners had no choice other than to call the police. The second instance also resulted from a party hosted by Mr. Ogamien. An individual attending the party came to the restaurant to get change for a \$100 bill. The waitress gave it to him and he left. After an hour, the same man returned to the restaurant asking for change for another \$100 bill. This caused alarm with the waitress and when she went to check the bill the man ran back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor party room. After checking the bill, we determined that it was a forgery and police were called. We felt it was our civic duty and obligation to alert the police. Since the man ran to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, the police went to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

to look for him. These two instances are the only times Fasika Ethiopian Restaurant called police on Mr. Ogiamien. Any other calls made to the police were not initiated by the restaurant.

Response to accusations of Fasika hosting loud parties:

- Fasika Ethiopian Restaurant is a family friendly restaurant and as such does not host loud parties. We have had Ethiopian guitar players in the restaurant to entertain our guests, but no loud DJ parties of any kind.

Fasika is a long time community partner and contributor to various charitable organizations. The restaurant has given its time, money, and food to various causes. It has received many rewards for its contributions to the city and to the Minneapolis and St. Paul community. Below are few examples of awards the business has received:

- 2003 Senator Paul & Sheila Wellstone - Outstanding Business Achievement Award
- Hamline Midway Neighborhood - 2003 Small Business of the Year
- Mpls St. Paul Magazine 2010 Dinners Choice Award & Top 75 Critics pick in the Twin Cities
- City Pages 2010 Best Ethiopian Restaurant in the Twin Cities
- Minneapolis Magazine 2008 Dinners Choice Award
- Minneapolis Magazine 2009 Dinners Choice Award
- Minneapolis Magazine 2010 Dinners Choice Award
- Minneapolis Magazine 2011 Dinners Choice Award
- Minneapolis Magazine 2012 Dinners Choice Award
- Minneapolis Magazine 2013 Dinners Choice Award
- Recommended by Yelp.com (4 stars)
- Recommended by TripAdvisor (4 1/2 stars)
- 2010 Best Ethiopian Restaurant by City Choice
- 2012 Best Ethiopian Restaurant by City Choice
- NDC Small Business of the Year Award 2011
- NDC Small Business of the Year Award 2003

Since learning of deficiencies noted by the City of St. Paul, Fasika has corrected a majority of the issues. The only two deficiencies pending completion require a city permit. We are currently working with industry professionals to correct these matters as soon as possible. We thank you for alerting us of these deficiencies as we want to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for our customers and employees.

Since we do not have control over the landlord's actions, we ask the City Council consider granting a Certificate of Occupancy to areas of the building that are in complaint with the City of St. Paul. Fasika is an important business in the neighborhood. If it closes, all businesses, customer, and residents in the area will be negatively affected. We thank you for your time and greatly appreciate your consideration. Please call me any time to discuss on my cell phone at 651-278-3132.

Sincerely,

Sosena Alemayehu