

Mai Vang

To: *CI-StPaul_Contact-Council; Joanna Zimny
Subject: RE: public comment on 799 University, RLH RR 26-2

From: S Mason <sonjalmason@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, February 9, 2026 1:07 PM
To: *CI-StPaul_Contact-Council <Contact-Council@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Subject: public comment on 799 University, RLH RR 26-2

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Council members:

Please accept my public comment AGAINST "[RLH RR 26-2](#) Ordering the rehabilitation or razing and removal of the structures at 799 UNIVERSITY AVENUE WEST within fifteen (15) days after the February 18, 2026 City Council Public Hearing."

I would like to ask the council to grant an extension to repair the building at 799 University. In short, the owner should be given more to repair and structure and save this building.

The structure should be protected for its historic significance. The historic brick structure at 799 University has strong connections to the African American community in Rondo in the 1950s and 1960s, having been owned by an African American businessman, Chester Odin, and housed important musical venues. Both Road Buddy's and the Ebony Lounge are mentioned by name in the Saint Paul African American Historic & Cultural Context (link: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/25aaf4a7929840c1866b39c3753c8bfe>). The formal historic recognition of buildings important to the African American community in St Paul is long overdue. While a 2017 study was conducted, St Paul has to establish an historic district related to African American community, and what remains of the Rondo neighborhood.

Beyond the obvious historic importance of the building, it is my understanding that the current owner wishes to renovate the building and has a plan in place to do so. Please give him to opportunity to restore the property.

I know we are in time of great stress locally, and perhaps the importance of an old building might not seem to reach the threshold for action, but if this piece of built history is razed there is no bringing it back. Please don't erase this record of St Paul's African American community, entrepreneurship, and culture.

Sincerely,
Sonja Mason
Ward 2

BUSINESS

St. Paul Businessman, Companion Drown In Lake

Chester Oden, 55, nationally known proprietor of Road Buddy's Barbecue and Ebony Lounge in St. Paul, Minn., and Road Buddy's Bar-B-Que in the St. Louis Park suburb of Minneapolis, and a companion, Jerome Walker, 39, were found drowned in Sandy Lake near MacGregor. Oden and Walker, an electrician, were reported duck hunting. A farmer reported hearing cries for help and rode out into the lake. He found only the overturned boat, two hunting caps, two shotgun cases, and a heater floating in the water. Sheriff Fred Erlanson and his deputy found a locked car near the scene. Ownership was traced to Mrs. Joyce Walker, wife of Oden's companion. The bodies were not recovered until the next day. Oden is survived by a son, Chester Jr., of Los Angeles; two daughters, Mrs. Rhoden Gardens of Richmond, Calif., and Toya Oden, San Francisco. He had five brothers and five sisters and no grandchildren.



Oden with specialty.



