

Dear Councilmember Tolbert and the City Council,

This is Duane Johnson from Ward 3. My wife and I have lived here in St. Paul for 31+ years, enjoy our neighbors, and love the diversity of our community. We believe that it is a great place to sink down roots and raise a family.

I know that we face difficult, even heart-rending decisions when we have to settle on and pass a city budget. But I want to weigh in on what I consider to be the most pressing issues.

1. We need to have affordable housing, especially for low-income families.

I know that this issue can only be solved in pieces. One of those is to directly provide financial assistance to qualified families, the \$500 proposal. I know this is only a small step; the need goes far beyond the existing resources. But it is a simple way to provide aid until a family income can rise.

Another is to see that help is available for homeowners and renters to claim their property tax refund. I served as a volunteer in the AARP free tax service in St. Paul. In my 10 years of service I did hundreds of these. The typical refund of several hundred dollars made a welcome bump in income for all, but especially for renters. Perhaps equally important, it relieved the fear of the complex paperwork and worry of doing it wrong. This service was a powerful teaching tool - how to fill out the forms themselves, how mysterious government systems work, and that St. Paul has a supporting community and is good place to live.

2. We need full funding for the Office of Neighborhood Safety.

While we must continue to stop bad behavior on our streets, we must offer interventions that don't drive further crime. Wealthier suburbs (families) work like crazy to keep their young offenders out of the detention system. We need that kind of investment too, and the Community First Public Safety effort gives us a framework. Let's support it. We can't police our way out of crime. Building more community involvement is vital.

3. Invest in affordable housing or such programs.

A family needs a place to live without fear of being uprooted. I believe we, the Mayor and City Council, all agree here. Let's put Federal dollars to work on this issue.

Thank you for your work to build a strong and diverse St. Paul.

Duane Johnson  
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