To: David Hoban, Deputy Director, Department of Safety and Inspections
Andrew Shanley, Investigative Commander for the St. Paul Police Western District
Mayor Carter, City of Saint Paul
Council President Noecker, Council President
Councilmember Bowie, Ward 1
Interim Councilmember Privratsky, Ward 4
Mike Koch and Jason Skar of MetroPlains Management, LLC
Mike Hahm, Project Advisor, United Village
Ken Vinje, Senior Property Manager, Kraus-Anderson Realty Company

From: Union Park District Council

Re: Graffiti on the side of 1605 University Avenue W and on billboards on top of 1605 University Avenue W

Graffiti on the side of 1605 University Avenue West and graffiti on the two (2) billboards on top of University West negatively impacts the attractiveness of the commercial corridor. It can be seen in Google Maps' photos (see Appendix #1) and is visible to potential visitors. According to Chapter 64 of the zoning code, "Unsightly signs must be repaired or removed within fifteen (15) days of notification." However, the Department of Safety and Inspections was notified of the graffiti in December 2024 (see Appendix #2 and the attached email chain). It is now August 2025. Due to Chapter 64 of the zoning code regarding signage and the negative impact the graffiti has on our commercial corridor, the unsightly billboards need to be repaired or removed, the graffiti on the wall needs to be removed, and we request the City provide our business community with weekly updates as to progress of remediation.

Recently we have noted a confusing development regarding the graffiti. Photographs taken August 6, 2025 show both billboards have had the graffiti on the advertising panels covered by black paint (see Appendix #3). While we acknowledge Mr. Hoban's August 7 communication to us explaining the vendors' work to remove the graffiti was "stopped due to the owners of the buildings . . . not wanting workers on their property and general interference with completing the work," we request that we be notified when the City notifies the signs' owners so we can inform the business community when the unsightly billboards will be repaired or removed.

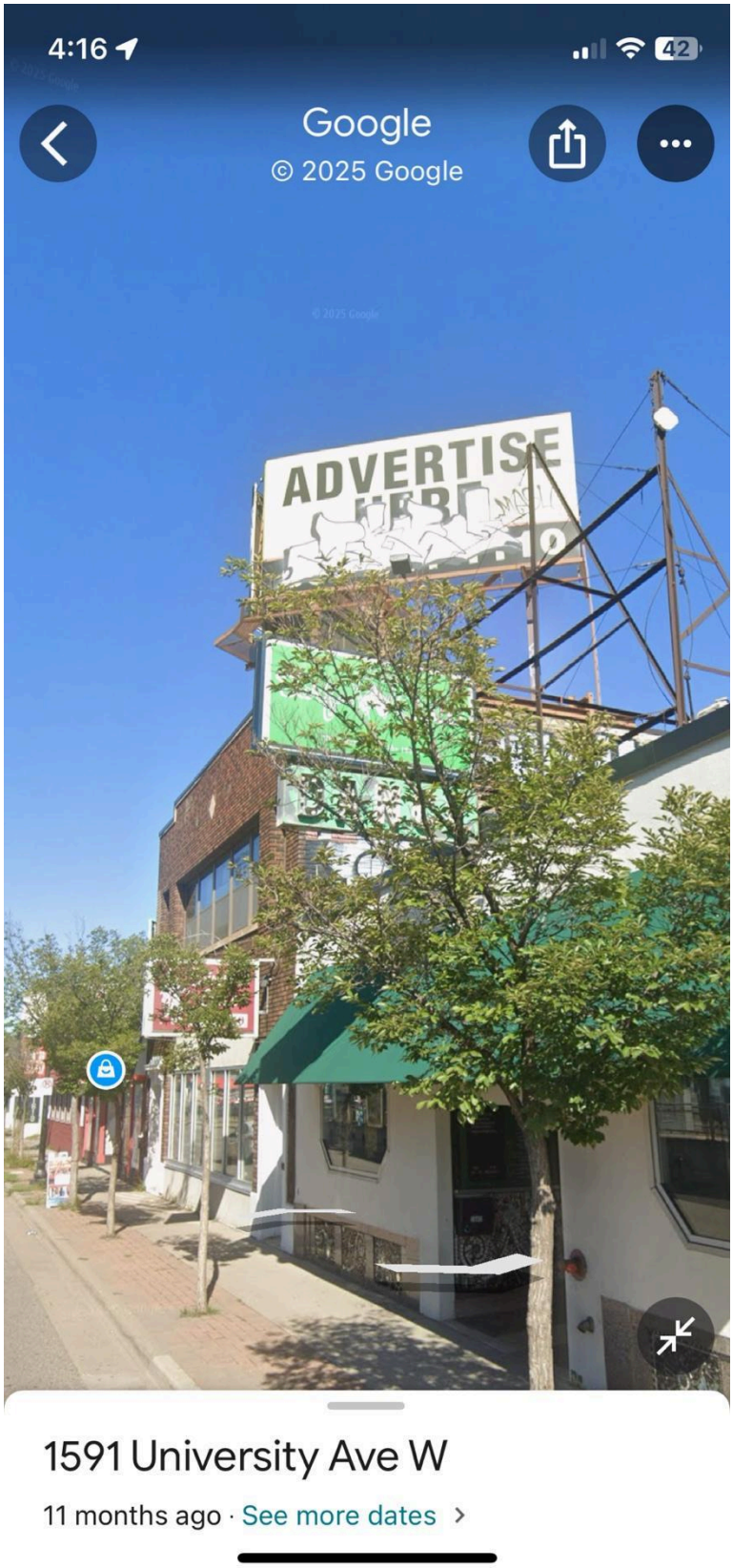
As our businesses compete with other businesses for customers and as Saint Paul competes with other cities for businesses, the timely removal of graffiti weighs heavily on the hope of growing our tax base. With "a concern for the visual environment which makes the city a more desirable place to live," we ask that a process evaluation be considered to discover improvements to secure the timeliness of removal in the future.

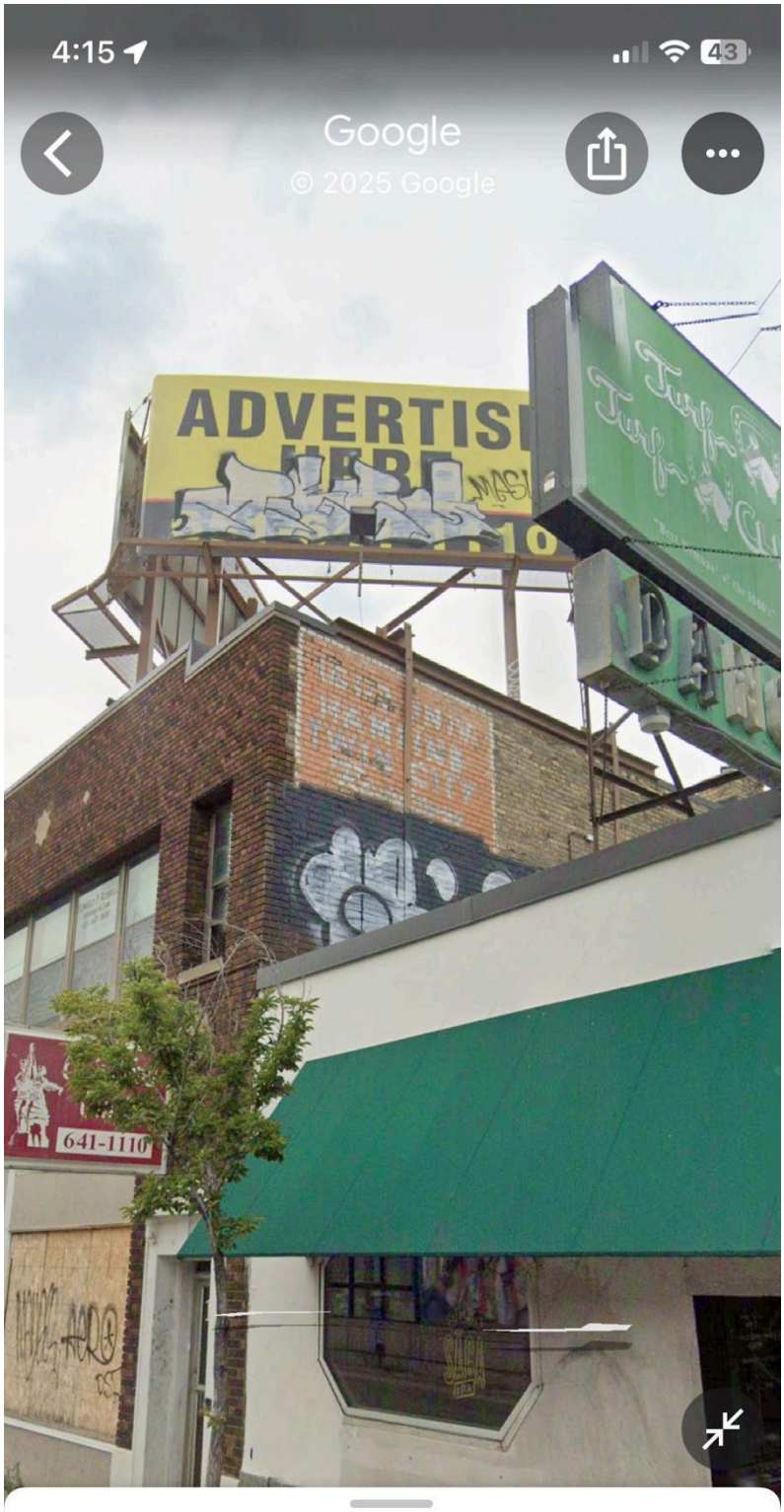
In order for Saint Paul to attract and sustain a robust business sector, there is a need to develop and implement communication and complaint resolution requirements for the Department of Safety and Inspections. We would be happy to provide one or more participants to a City task force to draft these requirements.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dvorak
Union Park District Council President

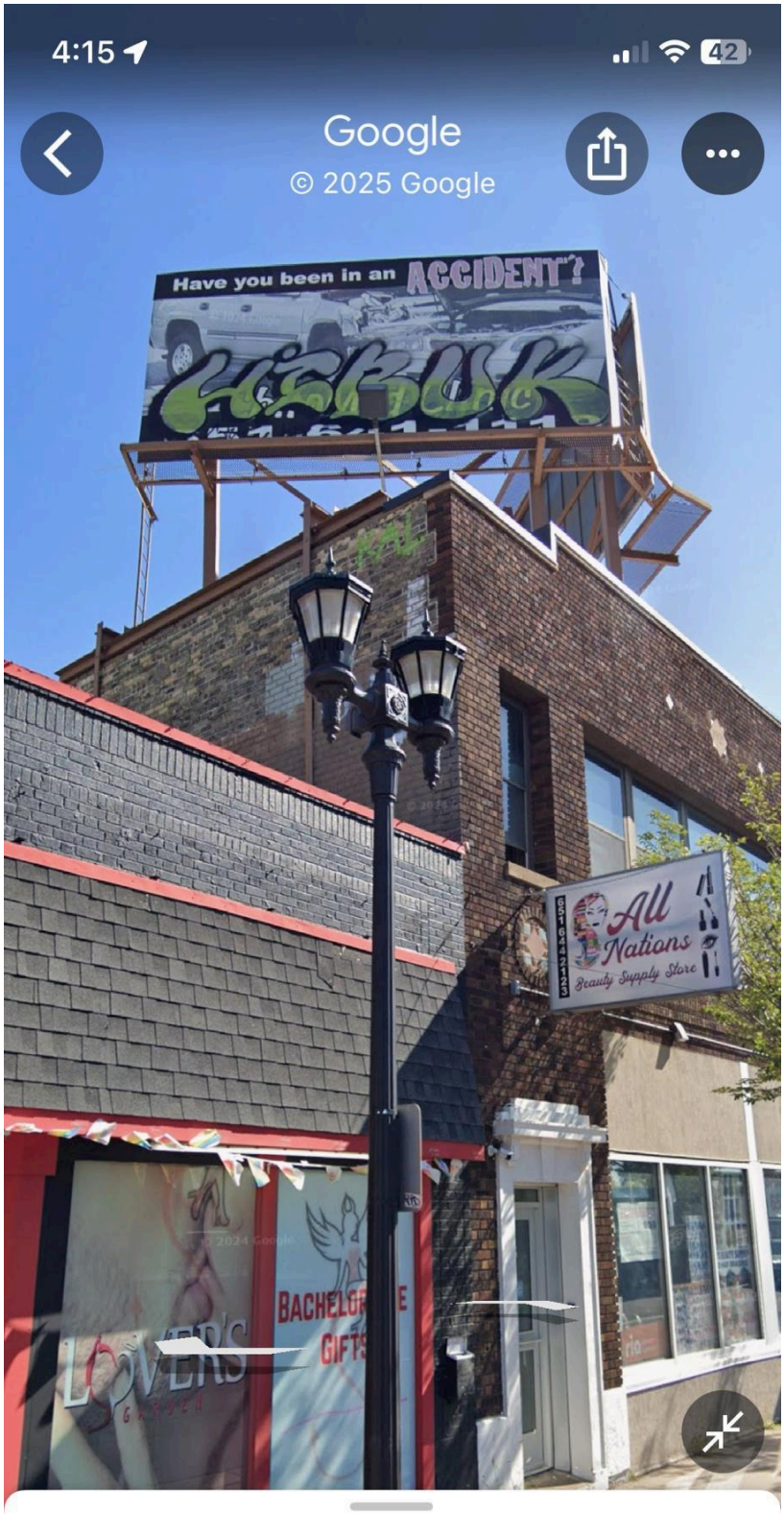
Appendix #1 – Photographs from Google Maps Streetview





1601 University Ave W

4 years ago · See more dates ›



1607 University Ave W

11 months ago · See more dates ›

Appendix #2

Summary of the attached emails:

Mike Koch and Jason Skar of MetroPlains Management, LLC (the building managers for the Spruce Tree Center) have repeatedly notified the Department of Safety and Inspections since December 2024. The Spruce Tree Center is currently at 55% occupancy and, despite the addition of the loon sculpture last year, they are having difficulty attracting new tenants and retaining current tenants due to the boarded up CVS and very large billboard-sized graffiti.

On June 10, 2025, Mr. Koch met with Andrew Shanley, Investigative Commander for the Police Department's Western District, and with Jenne Nelson, Ward 4 Interim Legislative Aide. A June 11, 2025 email from Mr. Koch stated:

> "Both of you offered to give DSI a 'nudge' concerning the graffiti on the 1605 University building as well as the graffiti on the bill board on the roof of the 1605 University building."

A June 12, 2025 email from Andrew Shanley, Investigative Commander for the Police Department's Western District to David Hoban, Deputy Director, City of St. Paul's Department of Safety and Inspections stated:

> "Any chance your department can follow-up with Parks and Recs to see where we stand with the below noted graffiti complaint? The building owner has made several inquiries through DSI to clean-up the graffiti. If there is anything you can do to elevate to the appropriate people, I'd appreciate it."

A June 12 email from Mr. Hoban to Commander Shanley stated:

> "First, acknowledging that this process has taken a long time, thank you for your patience and my apologies.
> We have been working with Parks and through the process to find a vendor that will be able to accomplish the work. The areas that need to be addressed are not in the usual line of work for graffiti removal performed by the city. They are large and in locations that are difficult to access for several reasons.
> That said, Parks has hired a vendor, and the PO has been issued. Currently Parks is working on coordinating timing with them and where this fits in with their scheduling and coordinating.
> I hope this helps and I am available for questions, so please feel free to contact me in the future."

A June 26 email from Mr. Koch to Mr. Hoban stated:

> "Since we are at the 2 week mark, since your e-mail, the ownership of 1600 Spruce Tree has asked to check in with you for an update; as to whether the vendor has coordinated and scheduled the work?
> We continue to be adversely impacted by this graffiti. For example, today our tenant Minnesota Council on Disability is having an event to open their new conference room. Several dignitaries will be attending including Minnesota Senator John Marty, Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon, Erica Rivers and Gaelyn Lea. When these folks arrive they will be greeted with the boarded up CVS Store and this very large billboard sized graffiti."

A July 8 email from Mr. Koch to Mr. Hoban stated:

> "We are now at July 8, almost a month, since your e-mail, the ownership of 1600 Spruce Tree has asked to check in with you for an update; as to whether the vendor has coordinated and scheduled the work?
> We continue to be adversely impacted by this graffiti."

A July 23 email from Ms. Nelson to Mr. Koch stated:

> "Checking in on this (and apologies so much time has passed)- have you heard anything back

from Deputy Director Hoban? If not, we will amplify."

A July 23 email from Mr. Koch to Ms. Nelson stated:

"Thanks for the follow up.
We have reached out twice since June 12, to Mr. Hoban as to scheduling for the removal of the graffiti and have not received a response from Mr. Hoban, as of today.
With the closing of the Cub Foods nearby, this issue is more important ever."

Appendix #3– Photographs of Black Painted Panels