

Council members Carter, Thune, Tolbert, Stark, Brendmoen, Bostrom and Lantry...

I had the occasion to attend the Variance Board meeting last week on another matter and witnessed the discussion surrounding the request by Cossetta's for a variance regarding their storm water management. As a resident of St. Paul (682 Goodrich Avenue), I felt compelled to convey my thoughts to you as you consider the appeal. My experience in the commercial real estate development business over the last 30 years, including building Landmark Towers downtown, gives me a perspective on navigating the increasingly complex and often obstructive regulating process.

In this particular matter, while I understand the need to better manage storm water run-off (in fact, we won an award from the Rice Creek Watershed last year for our rain garden at our REI store in Roseville), there are circumstances that on occasion require that a prudent common sense alternative be applied to our ordinance enforcement. As a resident of the Grand Avenue neighborhood, I found it refreshing that you would take another look at the Cupcake parking issue in hopes of finding a way to allow a new business to locate in St. Paul.

In the Cossetta case, as I understand it, there will be no increase in the amount of storm water from the current amount, and it will be at least filtered to some extent which it is currently not. The staff report centers on the non-compliant run off rate. The unique bedrock and tunnel conditions under downtown properties present very unusual conditions for both construction and storm water management - all resulting in sometimes prohibitive development costs, and in this case - additional risk to operations and structures from the proposed mitigating requirements.

I know some of the Variance Board had concerns about setting a precedent by granting this variance request and voted to deny it solely on that point. I would offer that if in the future, another variance request was submitted with similar limiting conditions, you would consider making an exception as I well. Given the difficulty in attracting and retaining long time successful businesses like Cossetta to St. Paul, I believe all residents want future developers and existing businesses to consider St. Paul an inviting place to locate, not only providing a more livable city, but increasing our tax base as well.

If you grant the variance, and we experience an extremely heavy rain, my understanding is that the water will pond in the parking lot on site - and realistically be of little consequence to the watershed system compared to what exists today. I would hope the benefits of this development and the unique circumstances simply support a deviation from strict adherence to the ordinance and you see fit to grant the variance.

I appreciate your consideration.

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