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Amy Brendmoen, Councilmember
Melvin Carter, Councilmember
Russ Stark, Councilmember
Chris Tolbert, Councilmember
Honorable Mayor Chris Coleman

July 2, 2012

Win-Win Cossetta Appeal

Dear Elected City of Saint Paul Officials,

This communication is a joint proposal from Juliet Branca (Ward 2 resident) and Greg Blees (Ward 7 resident). We would like the City Council to take action to approve a **Win-Win Storm-Water Flow Control Proposal** for the **Cossetta Alimentari Project**.

We support **green** economic development for our city, thus we are now identifying a proposal which includes the following:

- 1) A Win-Win Compromise which requires three distinct actions.
- 2) Some possible solutions to help control the rate of storm-water flow into sewers.
- 3) The possibility of Capitol Region Watershed District providing some project funding for a Cossetta demonstration / learning venue.

Background:

We believe that our Saint Paul elected officials have an obligation to protect our city's environment as you pursue economic development that strengthens our city and provides employment opportunities.

We support the Cossetta Alimentari Project, although we think that \$2,000,000 in HRA financial assistance was more than generous. Being sensitive to the slowly recovering economy, we understand why the HRA Board provided extraordinary financing to get the Alimentari Project moving forward.

We are supporters of the Living Wage Requirements for Developers seeking City financial assistance. Last year, Mr. Dave Cossetta appealed that requirement for his project. His appeal was granted based on some reasonable justification. Nevertheless, it was difficult for many of us to understand why giving taxpayer money to help produce jobs, should result in the waving of a Living Wage Requirement.

All in all, we believe the City Council / HRA Board exercised good judgment in helping Mr. Cossetta with his ambitious expansion project.

We do not know Mr. Dave Cossetta. We have never communicated with him or with any of his agents or employees, before generating this proposal.

Our Understanding of the Current Request Before the City Council:

When it comes to all Saint Paul development activities, there are always three storm-water runoff issues that must be addressed when a developer's site plan is approved for implementation:

- 1) **Cleaning runoff before it enters a storm sewer** to reduce pollution in rivers and lakes.
- 2) **Reducing the total volume of runoff from the site being emptied into the sewer** to reduce sewer size and construction cost.
- 3) **Slowing the rate of runoff flow into the storm sewer** to reduce peak flow into the river and help prevent flooding, property damage, erosion and sediment build-up.

These three storm-water issues have to be addressed by **all** developers/property owners when undertaking building projects. Controlling storm-water has been a City of St. Paul requirement & priority since the early 1980s when Saint Paul was sued by other governments for allowing combined sewage and storm-water to flow into the Mississippi River.

None of the \$2,000,000 in HRA money for the Cossetta Alimentari Project was specifically dedicated to costs for dealing with any of the above three storm-water issues. Our understanding is the money allocated was Jobs Bill related. Specifically, the \$1,600,000 for a Forgivable Loan was based on future employment goals.

Mr. Cossetta did submit a site plan for his Alimentari Project which adequately addressed all three storm-water issues. Said site plan used an underground cistern to control the rate of flow of the storm water. That plan was accepted and approved by the City.

Mr. Cossetta's current request is to not have to comply with the rate of flow requirements for storm water runoff, as he now views constructing an underground cistern to be too costly. Also, he is of the opinion that using a cistern could create a potential liability for his underground food preparation operations. Mr. Cossetta claims his current Appeal to ignore Rate of Flow of Storm-water would not reduce his two other storm-water obligations: 1) Cleaning Runoff and 2) Reducing Total Volume.

A Win-Win Storm-Water Flow Control Proposal:

This **Win-Win Storm-Water Flow Proposal** is being suggested for City Council consideration; and it consists of three parts:

- 1) **City Council upholds Board of Zoning's Denial of the Cossetta Appeal.**
It would be poor City policy to allow any developer/property owner to ignore storm-water rate of flow requirements, especially in the downtown area where bed rock prevents water to seep into the ground.
- 2) **Council permits Dave Cossetta to submit a new site plan.** One which eliminates or moves the location of a underground cistern currently approved to be buried in bedrock adjacent to the basement food prep area.
- 3) **Mayor Coleman directs Public Works Sewer Engineers** to work with Capital Region Watershed District staff and Mr. Cossetta's engineering, design and construction agents to jointly find cost effective alternatives for adequately dealing with Rate-of-Flow solutions. These new solutions can then be incorporated in a revised site plan (#2 above), which can thus be approved by the City for timely implementation.

Some Possible Options That Could Be Considered To Address Rate Of Flow Requirements:

We are convinced that some combination of the below options could meet city requirements and reduce project cost or increase the revenue generating capacity for the Cossetta Alimentari Project.

- 1) Install a green roof on top of the proposed parking ramp. This storm-water trapping feature could be used for Bocce Ball with a pizza stand and wine patio.
- 2) Move the proposed large underground cistern to the basement of the proposed parking ramp (See the cistern in the ramp at the Minneapolis Public Library.)
- 3) Construct two smaller cisterns, one near the buildings and one in the below ground level of the parking ramp.
- 4) Install green living walls on the sides of the parking ramp or the back of the restaurant buildings. See example at this website:
<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/design/2012/06/barcelona-63-foot-vertical-park/2421/>

- 5) Remove a few parking stalls from behind the restaurant buildings and install rain gardens with decorative rain barrels.
- 6) Move the proposed underground pedestrian tunnel to above ground to reduce costs. Construct a covered walkway with green living walls and above ground decorative water storage tanks.
- 7) We don't like the idea of reducing storm flow rate at another Cossetta owned site as an alternative to reducing flow rate at the Cossetta Alimentari Project site. If that option is pursued, please make sure the water flow being reduced from an alternative site is being deposited into the Downtown Storm Sewer system. Other neighborhood sewers just do not have the same problems as the Downtown storm-water system. Downtown is built on bedrock, with little porous land to absorb storm-water.

Perhaps A New Financing Partnership Is Possible For This Project:

Juliet and I were most impressed with the **Capital Region Watershed Districts (CRWD)** willingness to contribute some financial assistance to the **Green Roof** on top of the St. Paul Fire Headquarters. They did so because while the **Green Roof** benefitted the City's facility and the environment, it was also designed to be a green roof learning center for the public.

We know **CRWD** is not in the business of providing financial assistance for private development. But, what if, the Cossetta project incorporated numerous ways to deal with storm water runoff, and the site included educational plaques that explained how the various ways worked in a private sector setting. Then perhaps **CRWD** could justify a small amount of financial assistance for the Cossetta project, as it would be a great location for an informal learning center. We know the Alimentari Project will be the lead private-sector tenant for the West Seventh Gateway. There will be an unending flow of people who could learn about effective ways to control storm runoff and help protect the environment. **Perhaps another Win-Win?**

Respectfully submitted,

Juliet Branca, Ward 2 Home-owner at 1001 Goodrich Ave
Greg Blees, Ward 7 Home-owner at 79 Winthrop Street

Cc: Dave Cossetta, Anne Hunt, Bruce Elder, Martin Schieckel & CRWD Staff