

Please enter this e-mail message into the Official Public Record of the Public Hearing for Item #22, AHPC 13-2 of the March 6, 2013 City Council Agenda. This involves widening sidewalks along Sixth Street between Wacouta and Sibley Streets in the Lowertown Area of St. Paul.

I oppose widening the sidewalks for three reasons. First, I don't think it is appropriate for the City to permanently provide space in the public right of way for private businesses to conduct business activity. In this case, the activity would involve three restaurants providing additional seating. I have no problem with allowing restaurants to rent sidewalk space from the City, either at fair market value or a percentage of sales, to conduct business in the existing public right of way, as long as the seating is temporary and doesn't take up an undue portion of the sidewalk. Providing a permanent improvement for such business activity sets a poor precedent and opens the door to other loss of public space.

The second reason involves the loss of on-street parking. While historically there has been a reasonable amount of parking available in Lowertown, all the new developments that are in process will put a strain on what parking is already there. Parking availability is a major factor that was considered by many businesses and residents who decided to locate in Lowertown, and removing these spaces will make it more difficult for some of these people to stay in Lowertown. The City should capture revenue from these parking spaces rather than remove them to only benefit a few businesses.

The third reason involves smoking. Outdoor seating areas at most restaurants serve as smoking sections. I eat out frequently, but find that I cannot enjoy outdoor dining during nice weather because so many of the people using the outdoor tables are smoking. I am a competitive athlete and so I avoid contact with second-hand smoke. It is bad enough that smokers congregate on public sidewalks in front of buildings, making it almost impossible for passers-by to avoid breathing their unclean air. I find myself holding my breath as I walk by doorways, especially downtown. I would not want to wait for a bus near an expanded sidewalk cafe, because it would be impossible for me to hold my breath that long, and I don't want my clothing to become saturated with unpleasant smoking odors from this exposure. Smoking should be prohibited in any private dining areas located on public sidewalks.

Please do not remove the parking spaces on Sixth Street between Wacouta and Sibley Streets and do not widen the sidewalk there.

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