

March 18, 2013

To: St. Paul City Council Members

From: Betsy Leach

Re: Boundary modification for districts 6 and 10

As a resident of the Hamline Midway neighborhood, a former district council board member there, and an employee of an eastside district council, I would like to express my personal concern about the proposal to alter the boundary between districts 6 and 10. Although, on the surface, this proposal may appear to be the essence of the democratic process in action, I would urge the City Council to postpone a decision about this change.

Such a change has implications for the entire district council system, not just the two councils, or the limited portions of them that are involved. These implications are the reason that city staff is recommending that a moratorium be placed on such decisions so that a proper process can be put in place to deal with them. Why would you move forward with this decision and then begin the moratorium? The district councils are about to enter discussions with the Mayor's office about how our organizations are funded, and about the expectations the city has for us. Shouldn't we wait until those discussions are completed before jumping into fundamental redefinition of some of our borders? The numbers of individuals in each council is a basic factor in determining funding, and thereby determining the focus of each council. What is a legitimate reason for redefining borders? -- Equity in funding or perceptions among neighbors about what defines the real estate value of their properties?

Should we be allowing current conditions in the real estate market, current perceptions of crime rates or poverty levels, or current disagreements among neighbors to determine the long-range configuration of neighborhood organizations given the task of building community and increasing civic involvement? Does this decision open the door for every group of neighbors to decide who they want to be affiliated with in the eyes of the City? Are district councils being set up for a revolving door process of incessant redefinition of their boundaries? The district councils have a difficult time as it is trying to meet the expectations of their diverse constituents - are they to add constantly shifting borders to that mix?

There are many people who believe that the borders of the district councils have been arbitrarily set, and as such that they hinder truly equitable distribution of resources, including political power. If this is true, then a comprehensive re-examination of the boundaries is in order, not a piecemeal approach based on current, shifting, short-term conditions, or short-sighted biases about how some people view their communities.

I urge you to put the moratorium in place NOW rather than grant this border modification and set a precedent that we will all regret.