

## **Statement of Blake Traylor**

RE: Removal of garage at 2013 Lincoln Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105

This all began back in May of 2014 when I received a number of citations from the City of St. Paul regarding my home. One was for my car parked behind my garage that had outdated registration and which I was considering selling; another for fence damage resulting from a storm and yet another required the removal of limbs (that I use for garden projects) and tires. The final citation was a demand that I repair or remove my garage.

Six months prior to this, I was terminated from a 16-year job as a direct result of a brain and spine injury that had become so debilitating that I could no longer use my upper extremities, tolerate sound or light, or stand for long periods of time. I was living with 24/7 head, neck, back and arm pain throughout as a result of a brain injury. My boss could no longer adjust the requirements of the job to match my diminishing abilities, so she let me go.

Five months prior to May, my father was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness and I spent the following seven months through last summer helping him have the best possible quality of life in another state for his remaining time here on earth (traveling back and forth whenever I could) and helping my mother make the transition, after 58 years of marriage, into life without him after he passed away.

In spite of living with chronic pain and exhaustion and an increasingly debilitating health situation myself, I addressed all of the concerns the city had about my home immediately (with the help of my sons), except for the one requiring the most money and energy output, my garage. During this time I had regular conversations with Inspector Ed Smith, to keep him informed of my progress and to request extra time in order to resolve the City's concerns about my garage. I shared with him a minimum of details related to my loss of several income streams, my health challenges, and my father's end of life.

He granted me extensions for the garage to deal with the challenges I faced. Under these circumstances I had no idea how I would be able to afford to repair or remove my garage. Dealing with the pressure from the City increased the sense of duress I already felt related to the landscape of loss I found myself in: my father, long-term employment/income streams, and my former good health and high functioning.

In the summer of 2014, a licensed contractor, who was the cousin of a good friend, came over to take a look at the garage. He thought it was absolutely worth saving and said that he, along with help from my two sons, could repair it. He indicated that their helping to do the grunt work would significantly reduce the overall cost, suggesting that we could get the price down to around \$2,000. He got busy (as did I with my father's end of life) and forgot to submit a proposal. After numerous phone calls and emails to him, he finally sent me a bid near the end of August for \$7440, far exceeding what I expected.

Beginning in the Fall of 2014 and extending through this past winter, my health deteriorated to the point that I was unable able to cook for myself, dress my self, drive for more than 30 minutes, have complete thoughts or eat. I dropped 20 pounds and forced myself out of bed every single day. I began work with a new specialist in December and simultaneously began working on entry into Mayo Clinic for diagnosis and treatment. Two months ago I was finally able to spend a week at Mayo.

In December 2014, I attended a Legislative Hearing to request an extension and to refute the excessive use charges. I was granted until April 15, 2015 to demolish or repair my garage. I still wasn't sure on most days how I would feed myself, get dressed, drive somewhere, type or write. My son drove me to the hearing and picked me up curbside. I had no employment and was in the process of getting my disability claim reviewed by Social Security (at the urging of my Doctor). I collapsed many times and ended up hospitalized.

During this time, between the hearing in December and April 15, I did my level best to contact contractors and realtors and make the best use of my son's infrequent visits home from college four hours away to rid the garage of its contents. He would pull the heavy items out into the yard and I would sort through things, pulling out mementos from my children's childhood (artwork, board games, books, favorite toys, and stories they had hand written) putting them into covered plastic containers that were returned to the garage for continued storage. The rest we recycled or tossed in the dumpster.

On April 14, I called Marcia to discuss my garage. I conveyed the feedback to her that I was receiving from contractors, that the garage was sound, that it needed some work on the perimeter, but that there was no reason to tear it down. I asked that the soundness of my garage be reassessed. She said that a building inspector would come out. I asked that he come when I was home so that I could unlock the garage and he could enter to get a look at the interior. I also asked

that the City notify me before tearing down the garage so that I could cover my 27 years in the making organic garden prior to demolition.

On May 5 in the evening, I noticed that the door to my garage was sitting open. I wondered who had entered my garage. I closed the door. It left me wondering.

On May 6, at 7:15 am, I received a phone call from my neighbor, Steve Gorg. I was housesitting elsewhere in St. Paul. He told me the City was at my house. I assumed he meant the Building Inspector, but he said no, that there were 6 trucks behind my house. I drove immediately to my house, arriving by 7:40am. By the time I got to my home, my garage was completely empty. I immediately asked to speak with the lead guy. First, I asked him where they put my children's artwork and mementos that had been in covered Rubbermaid containers. He said that everything had already been demolished. I asked him to please give me back my children's artwork and childhood memorabilia. He said there was no way to retrieve anything. I called Marcia but it was before 8am and she wasn't in yet. I called Joel Essling and he agreed to put the demolition on pause and said he would take statements from the contractors who had inspected my garage. Twenty minutes later, he called a member of the demo crew back, changing his mind, and ordered them to proceed with the demolition. I took photographs of the mural painted on the side of the garage facing the yard. It was created as a gift to me by my children and my nieces and nephews from around the country who had visited eight summers ago. I covered the organic garden with plastic to protect it from demolition debris.

These past couple of years, I've been under terrific duress for all of the aforementioned reasons, all while the City continued to pressure me with demands. I have done everything I can, within my power, to work with the city. I recognize that my "kill" date of April 15th had come and gone, but I was operating under the assumption that, based on my conversation with Marcia, I would be hearing from a Building Inspector.

I have several questions and concerns.

Why didn't I hear from the Building Inspector? Why didn't the City notify me ahead of time as I had requested? Why was the City on me about my garage when there are plenty of other garages in my neighborhood with actual **structural** damage, with leaning and sagging walls, while mine was primarily perimeter damage? What precipitated this onslaught of complaints against my home in the first place? I want to know. I am asking: "Was it a Citizen Complaint?"

I have lost my garage. I have lost all of the contents that I had carefully placed in storage containers with lids to one side. I have lost significant property value. I have lost my faith in the City.

There was no reason for the City to force this "solution" on me, financially or emotionally. The assessment the City wishes to charge me places me under even greater duress, at a time when I am already at a significant economic disadvantage because of health issues and loss of income related to those health issues. This event pushes me one step closer to homelessness. I am already struggling to pay taxes and keep all the balls in the air while I strive to heal.

I WANT TO KNOW:

- 1) WAS THIS A RESULT OF A CITIZEN COMPLAINT?
- 2) DID THE BUILDING INSPECTOR COME OUT AND WHEN? IF SO, HOW WAS HE ABLE TO MAKE A TRUE ASSESSMENT WITHOUT ENTERING MY GARAGE?
- 3) HOW WERE THE CHARGES ASSESSED? AT \$260/HOUR.
- 4) TO KNOW, WHAT MADE ME AND MY SITUATION SPECIAL? WAS I SINGLED OUT?

I WANT:

- 1) ALL CHARGES RELATED TO THIS SITUATION REMOVED
- 2) MY PROPERTY REASSESSED AND PROPERTY TAXES ADJUSTED ACCORDINGLY.

Thank you.

Timeline of Events re: 2013 Lincoln Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105

Date	Event
December 2014— February 2015	Worsening health. Multiple collapse episodes, landing me in hospital. Rapid unexplained weight loss. Ongoing chronic pain and exhaustion.
December 2014	Spoke with Councilman Russ Starks office (Kelly) re: pressure to repair or remove garage during a time of terrific personal duress because of health issues and subsequent loss of employment.
December 4, 2014	Sent Summary Abatement Order 14-238790 re: Garage demo by January 4, 2015.
December 5, 2015	Conversation with Council President Russ Stark's office.
December 16, 2014	Attended Legislative Hearing. Summary Abatement Order 14-238790: Oher: Demolish the garage and remove all debris/material from the demolition by April 15, 2015.
January 29, 2015	First visit from two realtors to take a look at my home.
February 2015	Received gold cards in mail again, reason unknown. Filled them out and mailed them. Called in to follow up, "thought this was decided in December, why am I getting these?" Told to ignore, that it was a mistake.
February 4, 2015	Two realtors returned to give opinion about value and repairs needed for resale.
February 16, 2015	Spoke with Marcia (legislative hearing officer) 651-266-8570 about letter sent requiring me to attend another hearing, after having just attended one in December. She said it's a non issue, that this was handled in a previous hearing and that she would make note of that in the file.
February 16, 2015	Called Marcia. They are deleting assessments. I was sent them by mistake; system not updated.
February 25, 2015	Professional carpenter, Bruce Peterson, came by to take a look at the garage and talk with me about repair options v tear down.
February 26, 2015	Voicemail from Paula Seiley: "Ah, Camille, Paula Seiley, City of St. Paul. Just letting you know that we are deleting those, you send in those gold cards, we've been deleting those assessments because at the first hearing Marcia gave you 'til June 15th. So, you do not have to attend the hearing. I am deleting them. If you have questions, 651-266-1916."
March 10, 2015	Called Ed Smith to discuss feedback from various contractors about the state of my garage. Out of office until March 24, 2015. Called back and was told to contact Carrie at 651-266-8989 or Rick Gavin at 651-266-1910. Left voicemail for both.
March 11, 2015	Tim Canfield from Home Tailors Building & Remodeling came to look at garage.
April 10, 2015	Called Ed Smith (651-266-1917); 2:30 & 3:30pm
April 13, 2015	Ed Smith returned my call. No contact.
April 14, 2015	Spoke with Marcia (legislative hearing officer) 651-266-8570; Discussed having Building Inspector with City coming out to take a look at my garage based on feedback I received about garage being sound from Contractors who came out to give me a bid on my garage. Marcia said that it would likely only be \$2500 to remove my garage and that the assessments could be divided over 5 years, worst case scenario. Understood that I would hear from Building Inspector. Wanted to let him inside my garage and talk it over with him so that he could assess it from inside, something which had not yet happened, to my knowledge. Waiting to hear from him. Also, asked for advance notice if demolition was unavoidable so that I could cover organic garden (27 years in the making) prior to demolition to protect it. I understood that I would be hearing from the Building Inspector and or the city regarding dates.
May 6, 2015	Garage Tear Down. Received call from neighbor (I was housesitting at a friend's home in St. Paul for a few days) at 7:15am. Arrived at my house at 7:40am. Spoke with lead guy. Entire contents of garage gone. Asked where the containers with my children's artwork, books, games and handwritten stories was. Answer: already demolished. Called Marcia. Too early, not in yet. Called Joel Essling. He agreed to pause the demolition and confirmed that I could not get the containers with my children's artwork back. Twenty minutes later, he contacted the crew by cell phone and changed his mind, giving them the go ahead to tear down the garage.
May 6, 2015	Spoke with Joel Essling @ 651-266-1904 (or 651-266-8585) and he agreed to push the pause button (after all contents of the garage had already been removed and demolished, including children's art work, books, board games and handwritten stories.) He called back twenty minutes later having changed his mind, giving the crew the go ahead to proceed with the demolition.
June 1, 2015	Mayo Clinic for four days: finally! Assessment and treatment for debilitating health situation.
July 31, 2015	Call to City Council office. Left message for Council President Stark. Called again on August 3, 2015 and left another message. Emailed Samantha at Stark's office at urging of District Council.
July 31, 2015	Called to speak with Mai Vang. Spoke with Marcia instead, as Mai was out of the office. She went over protocol for Legislative Hearing.

July 31, 2015

**Written Statement of David M. Tabaka**

Superintendent (retired) for 35 years for Commercial Contractors Kraus Anderson & Mortenson Construction

On Sunday, February 22, 2015 and again two days later on Tuesday, February 24, I inspected the garage at 2013 Lincoln Avenue for the owner, Blake Traylor. She had asked for my opinion about whether the garage was salvageable or if it should be torn down. She indicated that she had an order from the city to either repair it or tear it down by April 15th, 2015. She was primarily concerned about cost.


In my retirement, I advise and manage homeowners construction projects. In addition, I have structurally rebuilt a number of garages throughout St. Paul.

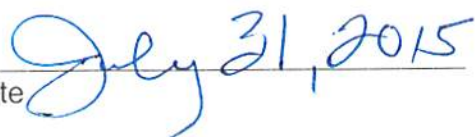
Ms. Traylor unlocked her garage for me so that I could gain entry and assess it structurally, both inside and out. From the outside, I could see that the wood structure was both straight and sound. The walls were straight and the roof was not sagging. Inside, the studs and rafters were all sound, which was evidenced by straight walls and roof line internally. Some roof repair was in order, perhaps in patches, and the "skin" or perimeter needed some repair from squirrel damage. Prior to my second return, I visually inspected structures on the client's double block alley and surrounding alleys before arriving at her home to make comparisons. I found at least seven comparables to her situation right on her alley. Some were even worse, evidenced by leaning walls, sagging roofs and rotting siding. I seriously doubted that the city would in the end demolish her garage because it wasn't as bad as others I'd seen.

I spoke with Blake Traylor about other more affordable options, such as using rolled roofing for patching purposes and using plywood to cover and secure holes in order to satisfy the city complaint. My quick estimate of costs was approximately \$2500 (two carpenters working for a day and a half and ten sheets of plywood and two rolls of rolled roofing.)

The only thing wrong with the garage was the wear and tear on the siding and the roof. It did need some replacement of roof boards, shingles and siding. Both of the doors were secure and locked. The asphalt roof shingles were not completely worn out. Basically, this garage needed a good patch job. It was not a hazard to human health or safety and was in fact secure from human trespass.

I was shocked to hear that this garage was demolished and removed by the City. In my opinion, there are comparables and even worse structures in the immediate vicinity of this garage. I am confused as to why the city applied singular pressure to Ms. Traylor regarding her garage in the first place.

  
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Signature  
612.802.1218

  
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Date

August 3, 2015

Re: Garage demolition at 2013 Lincoln Avenue  
Summary: Garage was repairable

On February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, I made a site visit in my capacity as a professional carpenter to 2013 Lincoln Ave., to assess the condition of the garage on request of the owner, Blake Traylor. She wanted a professional opinion about the practicality of repair, versus the option of tear down and removal.

I examined it from ground level from the outside and inside and came to an opinion as to its need for repairs, determining that with extensive work it could be salvaged and fixed. I could see that new siding would be required for the exterior, as well as a new window and service door, but that the majority of work needed would be in replacing the roof, including the sheathing and the roof trusses. I thought that the wall framing, although stained, looked to be worth saving after some minor repairs. I thought that the walls could be braced to allow for the removal and replacement of the roof for much less cost than the total replacement of the building, and that the wall sheathing after spot repairs would be ready for new siding.

Although the deterioration of the roof was apparent to see, the walls still had their structural integrity and I don't feel that the building was an imminent safety hazard to the neighborhood.

I am a lead carpenter for the St. Paul remodeling company Home Tailors, having worked for them since 1992. I have extensive experience working in residential construction, remodeling and home repair. If you have questions about this assessment, you can give me a call at 651 329-6697.

Sincerely,

Bruce Peterson