

December 5, 2017

To: Members of the Saint Paul City Council
From: Jane Carlstrom, 619 Bates Avenue, Saint Paul 55106
Re: Listening House

I have lived in our house on the edge of Swede Hollow for more than 25 years. In that time I have watched the neighborhood change from a place where I was afraid to walk from my car after dark to a place where life was far less stressful. This did not happen by chance. It has happened because of the hard work of many of my neighbors and the support of the City and the police. We have worked tirelessly to make our neighborhood a safe and welcoming place. My husband and I choose to live in this residential area because of its economic, ethnic, and racial diversity. We love living here.

Listening house has shown little interest in dealing with the concerns of the neighbors. The staff opens the doors to the homeless for less than 30 hours per week then walks away from the problems created by the guests they have brought to us. When LH closes for the day the staff heads home to more affluent neighborhoods and suburbs. Unlike us, they do not need to deal with homeless encampments just down the hill from their homes or with daily exposure to public drinking, intoxication, foul language, and the use of our neighborhood parks to leave litter, clothing, and human waste. It seems they expect the neighborhood residents to live with this uncivil behavior and to constantly monitor our streets and parks for illegal activities after they retreat to their safer, cleaner, and less diverse neighborhoods.

Since LH began renting space from First Lutheran Church last June I have witnessed public drunkenness with men stumbling out of Swede Hollow Park and repeatedly falling down in the street before collapsing in front of LH or in the community rain garden next to the Swede Hollow Café. I have seen public urination and heard my neighbors being verbally harassed. People sleeping on benches or in the park has become a common sight.

On many occasions this summer when Listening House was closed for the evening, or the weekend, or a holiday, Listening House guests could be found sleeping on the church steps, the benches on the church patio, or elsewhere on the church grounds. Some individuals have slept in cars parked on the street next to the church. With no sanitary facilities available these homeless folks use the neighborhood streets and yards or the Swede Hollow Park as their toilet.

This summer we learned from the police that that they could not ask these LH guests to move on, because unless there is a NO TRESPASSING sign it is legal for the homeless to remain on the church land. While the church staff have discussed the possibility of placing signs that restrict encampments on church grounds, in the more than five months that LH has been at 464 Maria Avenue, no such signs have appeared. I suspect they are unmotivated to do so because they are hoping to win their appeal in which case they will need to make no concessions for the safety and livability of the neighborhood. Neighbors have been told that it is not illegal for LH guests to sit on the open porches of their historic homes unless they place NO TRESPASSING signs there. Some have reluctantly done this. We all hate seeing such unwelcoming signs in our formerly friendly neighborhood. Even the Burger King on 7th and Maria has put a NO TRESPASSING sign in its door. I wonder if businesses and homeowners other City neighborhoods feel compelled to protect themselves in this way.

When LH came into our neighborhood without consulting the neighbors I was upset, but wanted to work to help figure out ways to make its presence here work...it soon became obvious that that was not likely to happen.

A business, even a well-intentioned non-profit business should not be able to destroy the peace and security of the residents who have lived here long before that business arrived and who hope to live here long after Listening House departs.

Please grant the neighbors' appeal and help restore our neighborhood.

Jane Carlstrom

12/04/2017

Dear City of St Paul Council Member,

Hello my name is Lea Ebensteiner and I reside at 441 Bates Ave. I purchased my home back in 1993. I fell in love with this property from the first time I saw it. It was sitting on a corner lot surrounded by the most beautiful huge pine trees and had plenty of space to garden and enjoy the outdoors. I have always been a county girl so living in the city was scary until I meet my new neighbors and then I knew this was going to be my home for the rest of my day's god willing.

When I heard the news from my neighbors a homeless shelter of some kind was moving into the church I was wondering how this was going to fit into our RT-1 historical residential neighborhood with a park just a few feet away. Well this summer I received my answer. Listening house opened their doors and their guests whom I have never seen before started to move in and start taking over our Neighborhood. They also started taking things out of our yard. On August 7, 2017 I called the Police and reported that I had two bikes, camping grill, antique wagon and solar lights taken from my back porch. I was told that there was nothing the police could do and the case was closed. We love to ride our bikes and were lost without them so we went and bought 2 more brand new bikes. On September 10th while we slept someone broke into our shed, cut the cable that bound our bikes together and took off leaving the shed open and the cable in the yard in the dirt. The reason I know it was a guest of the listening house is because one of the bikes was recovered at the listening house thanks to my neighbor being in the right place at the right time. It was confirmed that yes in fact it was a listening house guest who was in possession of my bike. The only thing that was done is that she was band from the listening house for one month. I've also had grown men urinating right in my front yard where my 6 year old neighbor had observed. Strange people have been found to be standing on our front porch talking on their cell phones. I have seen young children watching a pregnant lady with her pants to her knee's having sex right in front of them. My 16 year old son, who has to walk past the church on his way home from school has gotten the stink eye from guests of the Listening House. My son who is extremely afraid of break ins, now sleeps with protection (a knife) in his bed in case someone breaks in our home. This is all new behavior for him. I have even had to pick up human feces from my front boulevard. This behavior from quests coming in and out of the Listening House is inexcusable. We are no longer living in a safe environment.

Please relocate listening house to a more suitable location.

Thank you,

Lea Ebensteiner, Jonathan Ebensteiner and Jerry Dickerson

From: Sheldon Johnson [<mailto:rep.sheldon.johnson@house.mn>]

Sent: Monday, December 04, 2017 5:05 PM

To: Brendmoen, Amy (CI-StPaul); Tolbert, Chris (CI-StPaul); Thao, Dai (CI-StPaul); Bostrom, Dan (CI-StPaul); Prince, Jane (CI-StPaul); Noecker, Rebecca (CI-StPaul); Stark, Russ (CI-StPaul)

Cc: Lill Pohlkamp

Subject: A letter to St. Paul City Councilmembers regarding Listening House

Dear City Councilmembers,

I am unable to attend the Public Hearing on December 6 because of health issues. So, I would like to share with you the testimony that I would have given on APC 17-3, the public hearing to consider the appeal of a Planning Commission decision to affirm in part and modify a Zoning Administrator's similar use determination for Listening House. Thank you for taking the time to read it, and including this testimony in your considerations.

My testimony is as follows:

I am here to testify that the Zoning Administrator's office erred in their statement of clarification that the Listening House operations, or use, is substantially similar in character or impact to the use permitted in the District under consideration.

Also, the 2004 Similar Use Determination for St. Mary's Episcopal Church at 1895 Laurel Ave., referred to in the statement of clarification, is very unlike the use proposed, and being engaged in, by Listening House. It is an apples and oranges comparison. The Episcopal Church similar-use determination was oriented towards civic, education, performing and studio arts, including yoga, massage and piano lessons. Listening House is geared to provide a temporary place for homeless adults.

I strongly concur with the Staff Report when it makes 2 important findings:

#1. The first is that "The finding is not met that the use is similar in character to one or more of the principal uses". The Listening House fails to meet important standards and conditions of Home Occupation.

I have seen first hand the detrimental effect of Listening House's presence in the neighborhood, as well as spoken to a number of neighbors. Sleeping in outdoor public spaces, littering, creating a feeling of intimidation are just some of the problems created. There are no homeless shelters in the vicinity, and combined with the restricted hours, problem activities are easily exacerbated.

#2. The second important and accurate finding in the Staff Report is that "the use is not consistent with the comprehensive plan".

The site in question is designated as mixed-use corridor requiring compatible uses with the adjacent properties. The Listening House clearly fails in this regard, and hence is not consistent with the neighborhood comprehensive plan.

Lastly, let me add a couple of my own contextual observations. The neighborhood, and I, strongly support providing service to low income people in need. However, the location of this proposed use in this neighborhood adds too much of a burden to a small local area that already carries its fair share of social burdens.

I have represented this area for 17 years. Despite the struggle, frustrations and hard work required, this neighborhood has successfully managed to become a viable and desirable place to live. However, it would not take much for the neighborhood to slide

backwards. I strongly encourage you to support the years of effort to build a healthy and vibrant community and neighborhood, and grant the appeal.

I would also add that if the appeal is denied, it is essential that the conditions laid out in the Planning Commission Resolution 17-64, dated 10/20/2017, be required conditions for Listening House operations.

Please contact me at this email address, or phone (651.442.4658) if you have any questions.
Sincerely,

Rep. Sheldon Johnson

From: Patrick Kelly [<mailto:mmephitis6587@q.com>]
Sent: Friday, December 01, 2017 10:31 AM
To: Prince, Jane (CI-StPaul); Travis.Bistodeau@ci.saintpaul
Subject: Vagrant

Jane & Travis:

Good morning and a happy Friday. About 7:45 this morning I saw this individual (see pic); could not tell if they were asleep, injured, deceased, etc. on the sidewalk above the intersection of 3rd and Mounds. Called 911 and they responded quickly. After they roused him he staggered up the sidewalk towards 4th where he urinated on the maple tree outside our fence. I told him to move on and he weaved up 4th street and turned on Maria. This is just the latest of numerous similar incidents. These individuals who've been brought into our neighborhood by the Listening House are not only a blight on this entire community but a safety concern also as they have become very confrontational when asked to move on. Please file this as a complaint against and objection to these individuals being "dumped" on our community and further evidence that the Listening House must be shut down now. Thank you.

Pat Kelly



To the City Council of Saint Paul and its serving members,

My name is Eric Salinas and I am writing in response to Listening House, a daytime drop in shelter previously located in downtown Saint Paul, relocating into a residential area on the east side of Saint Paul. I live five houses down from where they are now located in the basement of First Lutheran Church. I whole heartedly agree that their mission is an important one. The homeless are growing exponentially every year and services like listening house are an invaluable solution to it.

But, since their move to the neighborhood their lack of communication has us scratching our heads when many of the problems happening in our neighborhood happen due to their clients. I don't think that I have to reiterate the problems we've been having. From trespassing, to public intoxication, to incident exposure and drug use, after many attempts to ask Listening House to curb the actions of their clients with no recourse. After attempts to meet and discuss a plan on how to help each other their only solution was not really to have one. Their unwillingness to help us make our neighborhood safe and livable for our families feels like it is in jeopardy.

Per the permit that Listening House applied for, City Zoning standards dictate that Listening House cannot be a detriment to the neighborhood they are a part of. They have failed in this measure continually. Even after attempts were made by the City Zoning Council to appoint someone to mediate an amicable solution and the neighborhood came up with reasonable compromises to make not only Swede Hollow but Listening House a safe sanctuary, Listening House deemed a majority of the changes unfair and counterintuitive to their mission in helping the homeless. To this day even the ones they agreed to have yet to be put into place. What I see is an incompatibility issue regarding the neighborhood. With many family homes in the surrounding area around Listening House and their disregard for safety and well being of the people in it they are not being the best neighbors they can be.

To St. Paul City Council:

My name is Milan Mockovak and I live at 720 E 7th st, a senior apt bldg. I am 86 years of age. I am an Army veteran, honorably discharged. I grew up in Chicago, was a juvenile delinquent before that became fashionable, was expelled from two high schools, and miraculously made it to St. John U in MN and got a BA. I've been a CAA director on an Indian reservation and have worked as a licensed MN Alcohol and Drug Counselor in a variety of programs. I also have trained City of St. Paul EEs in a program I called the Accountable Supervisor. . Most of my working life has been in social action programs. I am a responsible tax payer and support charitable and civic programs. In short, I consider myself a productive member of DB, a shaky start in life notwithstanding.

When I became involved with the Swede Hollow group, I was accused of being selfish and uncaring. "Have you no compassion?" was used frequently. Yet, the Swede Hollow neighbors simply seek an environment free of the unintended consequences LH guests bring; they simply want safety and security for themselves and their children, a place of respite and peace after a hard day of work, Have YOU no compassion, LH? Somewhere you must have heard, "Judge not, lest you be judged."

Part of any successful community action program is the participation and involvement of community members. Where are the details of conversations with nearby neighbors of Listening House? Was there a notice in the local paper? Was their proposed move brought before the DBCC. How were City Council members notified? What steps were taken to assure community involvement? Getting residents' opinions and support is a basic foundation for this kind of program to be successful. Yet I don't know of any concrete goals and objectives other than Listening House will provide some respite, succor, understanding and counseling to people beset by dire circumstances. Without measurable goals and objectives to alleviate the problems inherent in homelessness, the program at Listening House - although charitable - is one of enabling. Where is the accountability?

You can't mix apples and oranges. Listening House had a successful apple program downtown in an apple environment. Listening House then took its apple program to an orange environment. Listening House says they can't start over. Yes they can. The proper way next time.

Thank you.

From: Sage Holben [<mailto:uppelto@gmail.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, December 05, 2017 3:28 PM

To: Dermody, Bill (CI-StPaul); Prince, Jane (CI-StPaul); Bostrom, Dan (CI-StPaul); Stark, Russ (CI-StPaul); Thao, Dai (CI-StPaul); Noecker, Rebecca (CI-StPaul); Tolbert, Chris (CI-StPaul); Brendmoen, Amy (CI-StPaul)

Subject: Voter/resident opinion on Listening House and Wednesday Vote

Dear Council Representative:

I am writing as a resident of Dayton's Bluff. I live five blocks to the south of the immediate area of Listening House, yet, as I use Metro State and the public libraries and the coffee shops abutting the affected area, I see daily how the drop-in center has become a magnet (ride the Green Line, talk with people and learn of the maps spread from Minneapolis to St. Paul giving directions to Listening House).

From the homeless men and women I have listened to, Listening House offers a place where there are few rules; a place where the more "self-respecting" (their words, not mine) homeless won't go. The promotional videos won't show you the chair being thrown at another 'guest'; or the bundle of hypodermic needles being pulled from the library toilet; or the knives confiscated from fights at the library and Listening House.

No, not all people who act out are guests of Listening House, but its presence offers a base of operations...ask the residents who recently found smoke in their basements when an unsheltered person, camping in the hollow, built a fire in an old vent pipe; or hikers come across 'homes' made of woven branches, near large fire pits and holes dug for toilets.

FACT: Homelessness is a social and economic problem.

FACT: Few people, especially those elected, want to be labeled as cold and ruthless when it comes to decisions about homelessness.

You are elected. How will you vote on the appeal? How will your vote be perceived?

Here is the good news:

You are NOT voting on whether people who are homeless deserve a place to crash for a few hours.

You are NOT voting on upholding your religious convictions (as a few Planning Commissioners did).

Your vote is NOT to oust people from services (Listening House does NOT offer shelter beds, nor meals, nor resource or counseling services).

Your vote is to uphold a Zoning Committee decision made upon finding its initial decision to be made in error. Your vote does NOT make you bad or a callous person.

Your vote in favor of the Lerma appeal says that you understand your responsibility to vote on the facts and the 'law' of the city code.

Homelessness IS a problem; a very serious one throughout our country. Allowing Listening House to remain where it is, a magnet drawing people with no stability into a vulnerable neighborhood is unconscionable, harming those with no resources, and those who become victims of abhorrent behaviors.

Please, uphold the Lerma appeal. In your new work plan, examine clearly the need for SUPPORTED SHELTER, with the funding and dignity that is due.

Attached is an item I had sent to you earlier. I'm including it as a gentle reminder.

Sincerely,

Sage Holben
705 Fourth Street E. Apt. 1
Saint Paul, MN 55106