



Listening House of St. Paul, Inc.
464 Maria Ave
Saint Paul, MN 55106
651-227-5911

*...a daytime community center providing hospitality, practical assistance,
and counsel to low-income, homeless, or lonely adults*

December 5, 2017

St. Paul City Council via Contact-Council@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Re: Response to Lerma Appeal of Listening House

Listening House is submitting this letter in response to specific claims Rene and Kim Lerma made about Listening House and its guests in their October 20, 2017 appeal of Planning Commission Resolution 17-64, which Resolution upheld the right of Listening House to provide services to the poor, homeless and lonely in First Lutheran Church.

The Lerma's general assertion that Listening House does not take accountability for the conduct of our guests is categorically not true. Listening House understands that some of the people we serve sometimes behave in ways that may be disturbing to others, and we have designed our space, developed our programs, and trained our staff accordingly. Before Listening House opened its doors to guests at First Lutheran Church, we designed our space to contain our activities within the Church grounds. At the request of our neighbors, we changed our entry from the north side to the south side of the Church, facing the parking lot across East 8th Street, toward Burger King and East 7th Street. Before our residential neighbors made us aware of their objections to our presence in the neighborhood, we talked to our guests about what it means to be good neighbors and we continually reinforce with guests that they must be good neighbors and talk specifically about what that does and does not look like at community meetings with guests. Once Listening House started hearing specific complaints from our neighbors we have taken specific actions to address those complaints, in cooperation with and with the advice of law enforcement and the Dayton's Bluff Community Council. Before and after Listening House started hearing complaints from our neighbors, Listening House staff has been and is diligent about assisting our guests, and those who have difficulty interacting with our guests, when staff sees or hears the need.

Listening House does not, however, agree that each of Appellant's objections need to be addressed. (1) Listening House does not control everything that happens around the First Lutheran Church property, which includes three parking lots. We share one of the parking lots with the Church but are not responsible for everyone who parks there. (2) Listening House cannot be held responsible for everything that happens in surrounding blocks and parks. Listening House selected First Lutheran Church as its location because the population we serve is attracted to that location, including people experiencing homelessness who have historically camped in Swede Hollow, the homeless and indigent people who have historically been served by First Lutheran Church, and the low income people who live in and around Dayton's Bluff and other Eastside neighborhoods. Listening House is a resource for the neighborhood, providing assistance and addressing issues where we can. (3) Not all of Appellant's objections deserve a response. As one of our neighbors pointed out at a Listening House/Neighborhood mediation meeting, we sometimes see things from very different perspectives. This difference is very

evident in many of the neighbors' exhibits that show people on the ground or benches in or around First Lutheran Church. Our observation was that they were on private property and enjoying the outdoors. The neighbors' perspective is that our guests were illegally loitering or having a medical emergency. A close reading of the police log Appellants submitted with their appeal shows the police agree that most of the behavior to which the Appellants object is not unlawful.

Let's walk through some examples from the timeline and photos Appellant included with their appeal application:

Photo 44 shows a black male lying on the bench in the First Lutheran courtyard. Staff had checked on this gentleman several times over the course of the morning and negotiated with him that he would come inside at 11:30. Staff informed Mr. Lerma of this agreement and also let him know that this gentleman was medically fine. Despite this, someone in the neighborhood called 911 for a welfare check. We can say with great confidence is that people experiencing homelessness are very tired. This is not a crime or a medical emergency.

In the original appeal to the Zoning Commission and in the appeal to the City Council, the Appellants wrote of an incident where youth were on their front step playing dice and claim this to be Listening House related. Listening House does not serve youth. Staff from Listening House encountered boys and girls (appearing to be ages 10-15 years old) on the steps of the Church and told them they couldn't gamble on Church steps and asked them to leave the premises. At no point did they come into the Church, nor did any adult who was with them, nor did we direct them to the Lerma's property.

The same can be said for the elderly gentleman (exhibit 87) who was found on a neighbor's porch with no shoes. He has never been to Listening House, even though we had looked for him in the weeks following the incident in hopes that we could get him to come to Listening House and hopefully help him.

The original appeal indicated Burger King quit offering condiments available for its customers because of Listening House. At the District Council meeting one of the members identified herself as a manager at Burger King. I asked her if they quit putting out condiments because of Listening House. She told me there is no truth to that statement and in fact, they occasionally will hold a backpack in their storage for people who are homeless and that they were doing that prior to Listening House's arrival.

Another neighbor, Jane Carlstrom and her husband walked through the church grounds one day and she told me that an incident had happened over the weekend when one of "*our guests*" was passed out on a neighbor's deck when she came home late at night. They reported the tenant was frightened and left. I thanked them for telling me and immediately called the police to get more details and to identify the person, so that we could address the situation. The police told me no call had come in that night so the person was not identified. A call came in the next day from the landlords. In this situation, there is no way to know if this person is a Listening House guest.

I received an email from the Executive Director of Urban Roots asking if we could meet and I agreed and asked why. She said one of her staff people told her that a guest exposed himself. I said that it should be reported to the police. I immediately asked for a description, time and location of event. I brought up the security video and while we couldn't see his face, we could see a person walk out our door, and we could see the Urban Roots staff person's car about 30 feet away. The Urban Roots staff person was driving west on 8th street, and the person in question had just walked out the building. According to the Urban Roots staff person, it was then that he exposed himself and she continued to drive on past. Julie and I met with her and showed her a picture of who we thought it was based upon the clothing description, even though her physical description did not match, and we looked at the video with her. She confirmed his identity via our photo. We urged her to make a police report, and she said she wouldn't. I then contacted the SPPD and explained what had happened and said I didn't think she would file a police report and asked for their guidance. Senior Commander Henry said we at Listening House should file a report. At no time did this demonstrate a lack of transparency or accountability on the part of Listening House, nor did the situation occur as described by one of the neighbors (that "he walked up to her and exposed" himself). He was at 20-30 feet away. The entire camera footage is only a few seconds from him walking out the door to her driving away. We did file the police report and we trespassed him from the property and he hasn't returned.

There are many pictures of trash and reports of public urination in the neighbors' reports, and it is indicated that this is new and all because of Listening House. However, a quick search of past issues of the *Dayton's Bluff District Forum*, the neighborhood newspaper, confirms that these have been problems in this area for quite some time. I'm attaching copies of relevant pages from September 2013 "Litter, cussing, and public urination" and October of 2013 "Lack of self-control hurts us all." These were written four years before Listening House moved into the neighborhood. So while both litter and public urination have been issues long before Listening House, let me be very clear, Listening House does NOT condone public urination and in fact we talk to our guests about that very issue and encourage the use of our four large bathrooms, the public library, or Burger King. Additionally, every day Listening House guests and staff pick up trash around the church property, and twice weekly go out into the broader neighborhood and Swede Hollow to pick up trash.

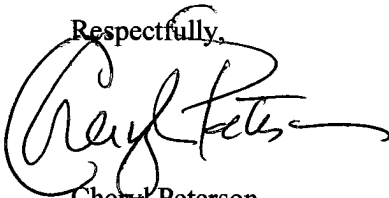
We know that shelters are full. Housing vacancy rates are 2.4 percent in St. Paul, more than 5% lower than the national average. Our city is in crisis. The unsheltered population is 22% higher this year than last year. Reports from Catholic Charities Higher Ground indicate the number of clients choosing to sleep outside dropped to 63 in November due to the cold weather. Higher Ground Saint Paul Men's, Women's and Pay For Stay Shelter served 573 unduplicated clients with 9,544 beds for shelter. Without Pay For Stay being added the number of unduplicated client served were 523 with 8,104 beds for shelter. The number of campers outside of Higher Ground also increased from 157 in August to 187 in September despite the cooler weather. The number of clients being turned away from Higher Ground because they were at capacity was 137 in August compared to 123 in July. The city has recently opened an additional overnight shelter. People are living outside in every neighborhood in our city, including Dayton's Bluff, where people have camped outside since the 1800's. We are well aware of this crisis and work hard with outreach workers to assist getting people inside, one by one. However, it is a much bigger problem than any one organization can handle. To say that we "abandoned" any of our guests is extremely

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offensive. We do our best to motivate and connect guests with proper resources. Since we opened here, we estimate that 28 people have gotten housing, many of whom were long time campers and shelter users. One of them is the gentleman mentioned in exhibit 102-4 who has been camping for the last nine months.

Finally, Listening House is a response to the homelessness and isolation being experienced by people in St. Paul and particularly in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood, not the cause of it. Citing again the Dayton's Bluff Forum of June 2014 where on page 2 it says the discussion was homelessness and on page 5 it boldly says "**Homelessness....right here.**"

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cheryl Peterson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cheryl Peterson
Executive Director

Cc: Bill Dermody via email

Enclosures

Dayton's Bluff District Forum September 2013 page 7

Dayton's Bluff District Forum October 2013 page 7

Dayton's Bluff District Forum June 2014 pages 2 and 5

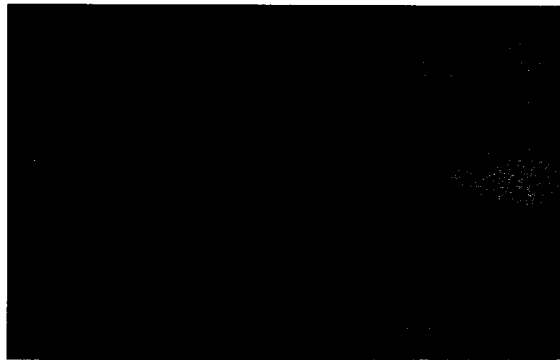
Electronic history of Dayton's Bluff: final installment

by Steve Trimble
Forum historian

The last three articles I submitted to the paper were stories of several Dayton's Bluff structures written for a new mobile app being put online by an organization called Historic St. Paul. They will be free for anyone to watch, but I am giving our neighborhood residents the first peek. These are the last two that will become part of the "electronic history." If you want to see some of what have been written for other neighborhoods as well, you can find them at www.saintpaulhistorical.org.

The Dayton's Bluff Commercial Club Building

The Dayton's Bluff Commercial Club was started in 1905 to provide a place for social exchange and community leadership. The clubhouse at 770 East 7th Street was built for meetings and socializ-



The Dayton's Bluff Commercial Club, c. 1910.

ing for the area's professional class. Later expansions added bowling lanes, private dining rooms, a men's smoking room, a billiard area, as well as a banquet hall and dance floor.

The Commercial Club often spoke on behalf of the community and undertook a number of local initiatives. In 1909, they published a booklet entitled *Picturesque Dayton's Bluff*. In it, they discussed the "wonderful strides in material progress" that had been made in the area. There were photos of many area businesses and industries around East 7th Street and the nearby homes of their owners. According to the booklet, "the many advantages offered on Dayton's Bluff are attracting home builders and residents" and over 700 new houses were going to be built.

The Commercial Club was involved in many activities in its early years. It had raised money for the erection of a ski slide in Indian Mounds Park. The organization launched an "industrial expansion project" to "encourage the establishment of industries in the East District. An energetic Women's Auxiliary held many events including many "canned goods parties" to give food to charities. Large crowds also came to their annual picnics.

The Commercial Club shifted away from involvement in civic and economic matters after World War II. The members were no longer the wealthy, but more of a cross section of the neighborhood. The leadership of the group had slowly shifted to small businessmen. It continued as a location for neighborhood events, including community sings, wrestling matches and wedding receptions. The annual bowling banquet after "pin season"

was eagerly awaited by the community. Hundreds of people came to Commercial Club events such as musical and vaudeville acts.

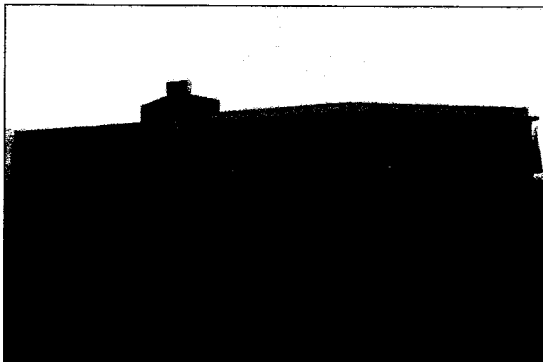
There were commercial clubs in many St. Paul neighborhoods, but they slowly faded away. The Dayton's Bluff Commercial Club was one of the few that hung on and continued to have members into the 1970s. Since it closed, the building has often been empty, but has been sold from time to time. In the late 1970s it was owned by a man who raised wholesale fish bait there and dubbed it "Worm City." Most recently, it has served as the meeting place for an Ethiopian Church.

CLUES and The Mexican Consulate

The number of Latino people living on the East Side has increased dramatically since the 1980s. There are now numerous restaurants, groceries and other stores that respond to their specific cultural tastes. The historic Latino area in the city was on the West Side, across the river from downtown. There are a number of groups there to serve the immigrant community, but in response to the growing number of Latino residents on the East Side, one of the important institutions chose Dayton's Bluff for the location of their new headquarters buildings.

The groundbreaking for the new home of Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) at 797 East 7th Street took place in 2004. CLUES was founded in 1981 as the first language-appropriate and culturally-competent mental health clinic for Latinos. It has become a vital organization in Dayton's Bluff and beyond, providing services that focus on health and wellness, education, and employment. They focus on the six core services: mental health, chemical health, aging well, family economic advancement and community health worker services.

A Mexican Consulate, the first in the state, was opened in a remodeled section of the CLUES building in 2005. In addition to its work in St. Paul, the organization serves Mexican immigrants living in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and northern Wisconsin. The consulate can issue passports and an identification card called a "matricula consular," which can be used to open bank accounts, cash paychecks and obtain marriage licenses. It also offers visas, as well as emergency services and educational and cultural programs. Mexican citizens living in the Upper Midwest no longer have to go to Chicago or elsewhere to obtain such documents.



CLUES and the Mexican Consulate

View from my porch

Lack of self-control hurts us all

by Sage Holben
President, Dayton's Bluff
Community Council

I've learned in the last month that one of the least talked-about neighborhood problems is also one of the most prevalent: public urination.

It's not a nice conversational topic, but it is more widespread than even I had imagined. Since the last article I wrote ("Litter, cussing, and public urination," September 2013), people have told me of several instances in which young women (approximately in their 20s) have jumped out of cars on Bates Avenue and dropped their pants. They pee on the street, in daylight – some between the car and boulevard, and some on the street, in the traffic lane. I witnessed one using our lilac bushes. Another story of a male passenger who, in daylight hours, simply opened his door and urinated onto the boulevard while remaining in his seat. When done, he waved to a shocked nearby resident and said, "when a man's gotta go, he's gotta go." The corner bushes at 4th Street and Bates are a common male urination spot, night or day. All this with a Burger King restaurant just a couple blocks away!

No, I'm not obsessed with

this topic. I am wondering what brings out such animal behavior in people. It seems my cats have more pride in their privacy and personal behavior than many people do. Is this the same animal behavior that "frees" a person to loudly talk in public about his or her detailed personal life of jail experiences and vicious relationships? To physically beat a person for no reason other than being triggered by unconnected, unspent anger? On the street I see people so quickly grab a weapon or use their fist to pound on someone else. There seems to be little hold on anger, self-awareness, or a full bladder.

What does this say to our many neighborhood kids? I try to teach them to walk up to someone to talk instead of yelling down the street; when on the porch, to treat the person with respect even if you don't like the person; to share what you have; be respectful of others' property...and then they witness public urination, which is so debasing to all those around. I find it easier to explain why one person physically slams another person than to explain the base and disrespectful action of public urination. Enough. Next is a visit to the city attorney's office to find out what can be done.

What's the BIGGEST THING this neighborhood needs?

Write down the most important thing you think would benefit Dayton's Bluff, then clip out this box and mail it to the Dayton's Bluff District Forum at 798 East 7th Street, St. Paul, MN 55106.

Dayton's Bluff needs _____

Name: _____

Or find the Forum on Facebook and submit your ideas there!

Ever think, "Someone should do something..."?

You ARE someone...in Dayton's Bluff.

Join us at our Community Council meetings. All are open to the public and held at the Community Council office at 798 East 7th Street.

Board of Directors:
3rd Monday each month,
7:00 pm

Land Use Committee:
1st Monday each month, 7:00 pm

Equity Committee:
1st Tuesday each month,
6:30 pm

Vacant Building Committee:
3rd Thursday each month,
6:30 pm

Greenspace Committee:
3rd Monday each month,
6:00 pm

Ask about our Marketing, Arts and Cultures, and Outreach Committees

Call 651-772-2075 for more information.

More electronic history of Dayton's Bluff

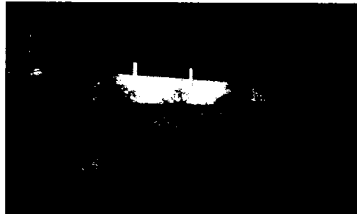
by Steve Trimble
Forum historian

In case you missed the two earlier "electronic" articles, let me explain. These are two of the several East Side articles I have written for a mobile app (application) for Historic Saint Paul. You can already see some of them online. These are new, and because you live in the neighborhood I decided to let readers have a sneak peek of the material. Just don't ask me how you create an app—I just write the information and someone else takes care of the technical matters.

The 7th Street Improvement Arches

It is Bridge 90386 according to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, but architectural historians speak in almost reverent tones when they speak of the 7th Street Improvement Arches. They consider them one of the most important feats of engineering in Minnesota history. Judge for yourself.

As the population of Dayton's Bluff began to grow, the residents wanted to have a better and safer way to get across the railroad tracks and the Phalen Creek wetland. As early as the 1850s, they started demanding the construction of a bridge. Finally, in 1873, an elaborate wooden bridge appeared on 7th Street. It was not all that well-built and soon became rickety. Once the heavy street-



7th Street Arches

cars made their appearance in the city, it became clear that a stronger bridge was needed. The street also needed to be rebuilt because its steepness made it almost impossible for the streetcars to make it up the grade from downtown.

The 7th Street Improvement Arches, with their unique spiral construction, were chosen to solve the special engineering challenge. The street crossed the St. Paul and Duluth tracks at a troublesome 63-degree angle. The bridge also had to carry sewer and water pipes in addition to pedestrians and vehicles. Work began in September 1883, and the bridge opened for traffic on December 18, 1884.

According to the State Historic Preservation Office, "the 7th Street Improvement Arches are historically significant for its rarity and the technically demanding nature of [their] skewed, helicoidal, stone-arch design." The bridge is one of the few of its style in the United States, and is the only known one of its type in Minnesota. The abutments and wing walls were built with gray limestone quarried in St. Paul, while the main structure was built with a buff-colored Kasota limestone quarried from the Minnesota River Valley.

William Truesdell, an experienced local engineer who had been involved with many different kinds of construction, was the designer. Raised on a farm in Wisconsin, he studied engineering at the University of Wisconsin and graduated in 1867. After working as a school teacher and a surveyor, he joined the engineering staff of the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway in 1880 and was hired by the City of St. Paul Engineer's Office to supervise the entire project.

One newspaper article said he was imbued with "the desire to go the beginning of things" and studied mathematics as a hobby. He was not one to flaunt his technical skills. When he discussed his work on the 7th Street Arches in a national engineering journal in 1886, he just remarked that "very few have ever been built in this country." But his fellow engineers recognized his achievements, and upon his death in 1909 characterized the bridge as "the most important piece of ma-

sonry in the city."

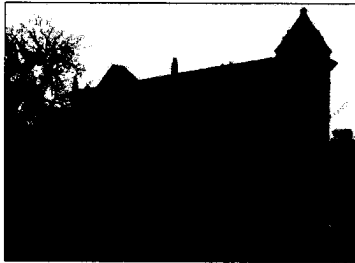
The 7th Street Improvement Arches represent the only documented example of Truesdell's design work. Although the Minnesota Department of Transportation merely calls it Bridge 90386, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. It was also placed on the American Society of Civil Engineers' Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks in 2000. Today the arches of the bridge shelter a bike path and a section of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail that leads into historic Swede Hollow. To view the arches, you need to follow the paved path down from the small parking area south of the intersection of East 7th Street and Payne Avenue.

The Stutzman Success Story

The W. P. Stutzman Block, a Victorian business structure that stands at 721-733 East 7th Street, was designed by August Gauger and constructed in stages from 1885 to 1889. Two of the original sections have been destroyed. For many years it was a vibrant commercial corner, and a Stutzman family member lived in a second story apartment through the 1930s. In the early 1990s, this building was a victim of urban decay and had become a problem for local neighbors, receiving many visits from the police. The area was heavily paved, littered with trash and blighted by a large billboard on the western end of the block.

The Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association (USHNA) purchased the building in 1994. The goal is to return this highly visible Victorian building to a community asset. Years of grassroots efforts and fundraising from private foundations led to the restoration of the building, which is now home to nonprofit organizations, affordable rental apartments and a busy café with an attractive outdoor patio. USHNA also arranged for runoff water to flow into a new rain garden, rather than the storm sewer.

In September 1994, the west end of the property was named August Gauger Park, to honor the architect who lived in the neighborhood and designed the nearby Schornstein Grocery and Saloon and many area homes. The community garden project, with its terraced flowerbeds and a stone pathway, was started in 1993 with help from a class at Metropolitan State University, the Dayton's Bluff Community Council, Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association, and many community people.



The Stutzman Building

Gauger Park contains two items of women's history. The first is a stone marker found at the base of the large cottonwood tree. It was placed there in memory of Bonnie Luke (1948-1994), a member of the nursing faculty and academic advisor at Metropolitan State University from 1988 to the year of her death. Along with other students, staff and community volunteers, she worked to develop the surrounding park. Bonnie's family and friends brought flowers from her former yard and planted them near her memorial.

The second is the Maria Bates Rain Garden, named for Maria Bates Dayton who, with her husband Lyman, built a house in the area in 1854. The neighborhood was named after them. When Maria died, her son gave a small triangle park to the city in her memory in the early twentieth century. The city recently vacated a section of Bates Avenue north of East 7th Street and the land was added to the park, connecting it directly to what would later become dedicated as Gauger Park.

View from my porch

Litter, cussing, and public urination

Minor, constant "quality-of-life" offenses more upsetting than reported crimes

by Sage Holben
Dayton's Bluff Community Council

Connections — it's intriguing how they come about and how we perceive them. Over the last few weeks I have attended meetings where developers and community residents have discussed disruptive activities at rental properties. Police calls, domestics and drug traffic are always cited as primary concerns. I couldn't argue with that, but something seemed off to me.

On the way to and from work I pick up litter. It doesn't matter whether it's Bates or Maria, the litter is abundant; especially so on 5th Street between the two avenues, and some days I feel very angry and disgusted by the time I arrive at work. One day, when I was talking with a group of young women, one finished her mega soda and tossed the empty cup over her shoulder onto the boulevard. A few minutes later, as I walked through a group of five young men on the sidewalk, I noticed a sixth, bracing his body with one arm against the tree — urinating. This was still daylight, early evening. That was my epiphany... public urination.

I have seen a murder in front of my home, been hit in the face with a broom, beaten by three adults, have become better able to distinguish gunshots from fireworks, and have observed physical fights in front of my home. Call me callous, cold, or in denial, but I have determined that my physical and emotional body can deal with these larger physical events better than it does with the daily litter and thoughtlessness behind it;

adults and children muttering m— f—er in almost every sentence, whether on the sidewalk or in Rainbow and regardless of who is present: stranger, friend, child, elder; public urination by males of all ages and fully aware of an audience (I am SO sick of seeing males urinating in public! It is NOT my norm!); two and three cars in a row speeding through our four-way stop; not even rolling through; and seeing children being abused, but not to the extent that child protection would be legally mandated to participate.

These occurrences don't rise to the level of a policing priority or police matter even if called in. Perpetrators, because of transiency or because they do not live in the neighborhood in which they are violating my peace, remain nameless and unidentifiable. Yet for me, these are the activities that wear me down more than the major events. The major ones have a high response priority, definite consequences and diligent search for evidence. The smaller, quality-of-life crimes are often met with a response of "don't risk confronting," "low-priority," and "talk with the landlord." These affronts are daily and often one upon the other. If we close ourselves off and go from home to car to work, we won't notice this behavior... is that my choice?

How do all people become more proactive in identifying and applying social, cultural and group norms, sanctions, informal social controls, self-regulation, chronic stressors, personal pressures and relationships within a small urban neighborhood? What is the thread that illustrates a common value?

Ever think, "Someone should do something...?"

You ARE someone...in Dayton's Bluff.

Join us at our Community Council meetings. All are open to the public and held at the Community Council office at 798 East 7th Street.

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Greenspace Committee:
3rd Monday each month,
6:00 pm

Ask about our Marketing, Arts and Cultures, and Outreach Committees.

Call 651-772-2075 for more information.

New Friends of Swede Hollow are welcome

The next Friends of Swede Hollow monthly meeting is on **Wednesday, June 11, at 6:30 pm**. Email karin@swedehollow.org or call 651-776-0550 for more information and the meeting's location.

Get rid of your junk car; help Dayton's Bluff Community Council

Budget Towing of Minnesota, Minnesota's largest towing company, is owned by Roy Carlson, a former Dayton's Bluff Community Council board member. Budget Towing will remove any junk car or truck – located anywhere in St. Paul – and dispose of it at no charge to the vehicle owner or the property owner where it is located. The vehicle owner will receive paperwork for a tax donation, and Roy will also make a small donation to the Community Council for each car he tows.

Just call 651-772-2075 to get a junk car out of the way – and help clean up Dayton's Bluff.

Meet with the police

The Eastern District Police will host their monthly meetings for community members at 722 Payne Avenue, at the corner of Payne and Minnehaha Avenues.

The next meetings are **Wednesday, June 18, at 6:30 pm**, and **Friday, June 20, at 9:30 am**. The meetings, open to all, are intended to address and listen to concerns about crime and other issues on the East Side.

Dayton's Bluff offers Community Meetings

Every first Thursday of each month there is a community meeting held at the Dayton's Bluff Community Council offices. Residents can bring issues to law- and code-enforcement officials for followup and discussion. It's a great way to build relationships with the people who work to keep our neighborhood safe, clean, and drug-free.

Each month we also explore a new topic with the community. In April we talked about pedestrian-friendly environments and making Dayton's Bluff more walkable, and in May we discussed homelessness (see page 5 of this issue to learn a little from the discussion). Come join us on **Thursday, June 5, at 6:30 pm** as we ask, "What is an engaged community?"

If you are unable to join us, you can always call the office at 651-772-2075 for committee and volunteer schedules.

Take-a-Hike June 7

Take-a-Hike occurs on the first Saturday of most months. The next hike will be **Saturday, June 7**. Hikers meet at **10:30 am** in Indian Mounds Park at Earl Street and Mounds Boulevard, and walk to the East Side Heritage Park. The hike is about two hours (four miles) with some moderately rough terrain. New hikers are always welcome. For more information, call 651-776-0550.

Forum monthly meeting

Would you like to contribute to this newspaper? Come to our next meeting, **Monday, June 2, at 1:00 pm** at 798 East 7th Street to meet the *Forum* board and staff.

529 Day: save for college

MN College Savings Plan release

May 29 is National College Savings Plan Awareness Day. A 529 College Savings plan is a tax-advantaged savings plan that encourages saving for future college costs.

Minnesota's plan currently has more than 33,000 account holders, and Dayton's Bluff residents hold 107 of these accounts.

The amount saved for college by Dayton's Bluff residents was \$1,575,142 at the end of 2013 – an average of \$14,720 per account. "Many Dayton's Bluff residents have a good start, but with the cost of college going up as quickly as it is, we're hoping more people will start saving as soon as they can," said Robert Stern, Program Manager for the MN College Savings Plan.

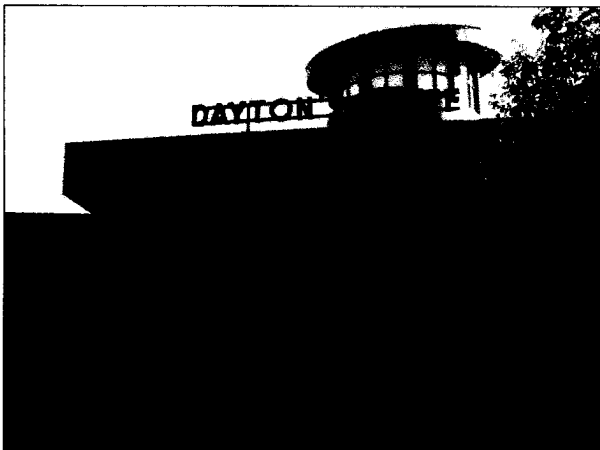
"There's a misconception that students hurt their chances of qualifying for financial aid if they have a college savings account. That is not true," he said. "Any money you save puts you in a better position to pay for school."

"Also, people think signing up for a state's 529 plan means they must attend school in that state. But students with a Minnesota College Savings Plan can use the money at any accredited college."

The minimum deposit is just \$25 and the fees are extremely low.

To learn more about the Minnesota College Savings Plan or open an account, call 877-338-4646, 7:00 am-7:00 pm, Monday-Friday. Information is also available at www.mn-saves.org.

Upcoming opportunities at Dayton's Bluff Recreation Center



● **Parent & Tot Time:** ongoing, Wednesdays and Fridays, 10:00 am-1:00 pm.

● **Judo:** Mondays, 6:00-7:00 pm.

● **Seniors "500" card playing:** every Friday, 12:00-4:00 pm.

● **Self-defense:** Wednesdays, June 4-August 13, 6:00-7:45 pm.

● **Teen "Bluff Room":** 3:00-7:30 pm.

● **Free arts:** June 18, 2:30-3:30 pm.

● **Jump Jam Double Dutch** jump-roping, Monday through Thursday afternoons, June 23-August 14. Ages 5-18; FREE.

● **Open gyms 6:00-7:30 pm.** Elementary school-age: Mondays & Wednesdays; Middle school-age: Tuesdays; High school-age: Thursdays.

● **Summer Blast!** June 16-August 21, Mondays through Thursdays, 12:00 noon-5:00 pm for 1st-5th graders; FREE.

● **Movie Mondays:** June 16, 6:00 pm.

The Dayton's Bluff Rec Center is located at 800 Conway Street.

651-793-3885

Facebook: Dayton's Bluff Recreation Center

Stop by and check us out!

Homelessness...right here

This special report was inspired by the May community meeting at the Dayton's Bluff District Council Office. See page 2 for information on the June community meeting and its topic: What is an engaged community?

Did you know?

In 2009 the U.S. Congress defined a homeless person as anyone who:

1. Lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; AND 2. Has a primary nighttime residence that is supervised, publicly-or privately-operated temporary living accommodation, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, and battered women's shelters; OR 3. Has a nighttime residence in any place not meant for human habitation, such as under bridges or in cars.

**On any given night in Minnesota:
About 14,000 people are homeless**

**Nearly 40,000 Minnesotans
experience homelessness in a year**

Who are the homeless?

The homeless are families:

- Nearly half of homeless adults have children. One in three have at least one child with them.
- The percentage of two-parent homeless families grew by 22 percent from 2009-2012.
- Children with their parents represent the fastest-growing segment of the long-term homeless population today – a 26% increase from 2009-2012

The homeless are children and youth:

- Children and youth make up almost one-half of the total homeless population.

The homeless are veterans:

- One-tenth of all homeless adults, and one-quarter of those age 55 and older are military veterans. Nearly half of homeless veterans have a service-related health problem.

The homeless are people of color:

- People of color, particularly African Americans, are disproportionately overrepresented in the homeless population. 38 percent of homeless adults are African American, while only 5 percent of the Minnesota adult population is African American.

What are the causes of homelessness?

- Nearly half of homeless adults lost their housing because they could not afford the rent or mortgage and/or they lost a job or work hours.
- Only 17 percent of homeless adults reported a drinking or drug problem as the reason they left their last regular/permanent housing (became homeless).

Surprising facts about homeless adults:

- 77 percent of homeless adults have at least a high school education; 34 percent have attended at least some college.
- 8 in 10 homeless adults have some type of health insurance coverage.
- Nearly one-third of homeless adults have histories that suggest likely traumatic brain injury.
- More than half of homeless adults have a significant mental illness.
- 51 percent of homeless adults report a chronic health condition such as high blood pressure, heart problems, asthma, respiratory problems, and diabetes.
- 22 percent of homeless adults have been diagnosed with a substance abuse disorder, which is a decrease from 27 percent in 2006.

Surprising facts about homeless children/youth:

- 60 percent of homeless youth have a parent who has been incarcerated.
- More than half (55%) of all homeless youth have been abused or neglected.
- 29% of homeless youth are parents, and one out of five has at least one child with them.

The above data comes from the Homelessness in Minnesota 2012 Study by Wilder Research and is available online (www.wilderresearch.org). Some of these facts were presented at the May Community Meeting at the Dayton's Bluff Community Council and neighbors began a community conversation about the challenges of homelessness. Though this issue is difficult and complex, some things are clear: First, children and people of color, two significant groups in Dayton's Bluff, are being deeply impacted by homelessness. Therefore, this isn't someone else's issue – it's our issue. In fact, Project REACH, which serves homeless St. Paul Public School students, reports serving 9 percent of the current students at Dayton's Bluff Elementary. Second, the major causes of homelessness have more to do with economics and affordable housing than personal choices. Therefore, tackling this issue is a community responsibility rather than just a personal responsibility. The community conversation must continue, as there is more to be learned and understood, and well-thought-out strategies need to be implemented.

Jennifer Herman, Forum board

Interview with Alan Grafiing

Sage Holben

Dayton's Bluff Community Council

"Time for breakfast, fellas," is the typical 6:30 am lights on/wake-up at Union Gospel Mission, home of Bethel Hotel and many services for men who are homeless.

Alan Grafiing summarizes his experience: "My son will always come first. With my own apartment again, he can have daddy cook for him. I've learned that rent will always be paid first. I want my child to be happy...I put Legos together, he played with them – we both had fun...but the rent needs to be paid first. I want to cook for my son. I have learned frugality in purchasing food and things for my son. I've learned the difference between needs and wants. If it wasn't for my son, I would have had a different path and it scares me to think what could have been."

Bethel Hotel at the Union Gospel Mission (UGM) has been Alan's home for eight months. A friend recommended UGM when Alan lost his apartment. Like so many, the spiral quickly went from losing his job to losing his apartment. For \$6 a night Alan reserves a 'paid bed' in a room with 33 other men. This is an alternative to a free bed which dictates an 'in-bed' curfew of 9:30 pm – among other specific requirements – or a private room at a cost of roughly \$180 to \$200. For a weekly fee, a shelter resident can rent a locker. Some men use their cars to hold their possessions, while others may carry their possessions with them throughout the day.

Life for Alan was once as normal as anyone's. He grew up one of four siblings, with his mother and Navy father. One sister is now in Colorado and the other in Wisconsin; his brother and parents have all died of cancer. Alan is an Army paratrooper vet and has been divorced for five years. He had been working in Mankato and caring for his ill mother. After his mother died, he moved to the Twin Cities so he wouldn't have to commute to see his son. He found a job in the Twin Cities, but was let go after two months.

A year later, he lost his apartment after trying to hang on while job-hunting, the futility eating through his 401K and unemployment. He went to court, attempting to keep his apartment. His apartment management stored his belongings as long as possible since Alan could not afford storage; since then, the property manager has been kind enough to continue storing photos and other very personal items until Alan gets on his feet. The heartache of losing family heirlooms and keepsakes reflects in Alan's face.

"Aid policies need to be in place so people are not forced into foreclosure or into losing an apartment [in harsh financial situations]. I applied for assistance to keep my apartment, but not in time. The court gave me a week to get the money needed, with the expectation that I knew people – friends or relatives – with money. A court-related call to the landlord could have helped; I was short of help by one week...just one week."

"My (eight-year-old) son worries about me. A child should not have to worry about a parent. We visit on the weekend, keep in touch. I had been calling every three days; lately every day."

"It's God who did the work. God's grace is what made it happen – so quickly. Two months ago God pushed me to the VA (Veterans Affairs office). I walked into my first

appointment knowing something had to change. I was told by an intake worker that I hadn't been homeless long enough [one year is required to receive services]. He called two days later, after having made some calls...told me I'd have a voucher from the Metropolitan Council for an apartment. One application did so much. The presence of God has kept me on a [positive] path."

Alan summarized his experience with Union Gospel Mission saying, "It's a natural fit for me; I'm a spiritual person, and UGM has a lot of programs that can help."

If a person has a free bed rather than a paid room, a few of the programs UGM offers are required – others are very helpful, but optional. These programs include helping men recently out of prison, including help finding transitional housing; helping men earn their GED; and classes on anger management and budgeting.

"A social worker employed by UGM is present and available every day," notes Alan, "and they are easy to access. A podiatry group offers foot care help monthly, for any foot-related problems, including foot massages. Health and dental care are offered on the premises, by East Side Clinic, Dr. Como, and dental students. UGM helps men to get their lives back on track."

Alan and other men from the Mission and Dorothy Day, enjoys the fellowship and computer access they find at Metropolitan State University and the co-existing Dayton's Bluff branch of the St. Paul Public Library. Other options for shelter residents, having to be physically out of the shelter for most of the day, are the downtown Passport which is for those over age 50; the Union Depot, which has WiFi; riding the city bus to the Minneapolis Central Library; the Veterans Administration; "and, unfortunately, downtown St. Paul, where drugs are easily available". Internet access and fellowship are very important – recreation often consists of watching movies on phones. UGM has no computers; people must have their own laptops and then sign a waiver in order to access the internet. Basketball and football are the usual TV fare in the common room at Bethel.

When asked how he sees people getting out of homelessness, Alan considered: "Start by recognizing 'need' versus 'want.' A person needs reliable transportation and a steady job. The city bus is the most common transportation for shelter residents. Housing and transportation are two critical elements in getting a job and stabilizing one's life. Alan noted that [homeless] people who have cars are working more than those who don't."

Alan had promised his son that he would be out of shelter in eight months. He would have realized his priorities much sooner, he mused, if he had been in touch with the VA sooner. Knowing what resources are out there, knowing what organizations are available to help, are key. Once he connected to the VA things really moved along. "Being homeless is life-altering, life-changing. Some people lose their sense of pride somewhere, or don't care. Not all who are homeless are lazy. A couple of bad breaks and we're forced out of our homes. Some of us are good workers."

Note: Since this writing, Alan has found full-time employment and is looking forward to finding an apartment where he can cook for his son.