

Vang, Mai (CI-StPaul)

From: Carolyn Brandt <brandtcarolyn21@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, May 29, 2020 3:30 PM
To: Privratsky, Matt (CI-StPaul); #CI-StPaul_Ward4
Subject: Re: court date

Think Before You Click: This email originated outside our organization.

Matt and City Council

Information below was in a letter from the city, the first has no factual basis. My door upstairs is not in use and there is an *exit door in the back on the ground floor that is in good condition and safe*. As I mentioned earlier, there is a house that has a second story bolted door and has been this way for a long time, without problem. Mine is in the process of being changed (permit on door) and theirs is not.

1. DOOR(S): All doors and its hardware shall be in sound condition and fit within its frame. Doors shall be maintained in a professional state of maintenance and repair. Repair second floor rear door that is blocked. Provide a guardrail and repair any exposed areas around the door frame. Permit may be required.

My lawn has ground cover, except for a few bald spots. Last summer, a landscaper came out to re-elevate the ground (in the back) and took away dirt. *Immediately*, clover was put down. Before dirt was taken away, there was ground cover. Because the city cannot work within my construction plans, a letter will be written to the newspaper. This is ridiculous. The city cannot dictate how much of my lawn is covered, unless it washes away in the sewer system.

1. YARD: The yard **lacks proper ground cover**. Seed, or sod, where needed in some areas.

For the past few years, I hired a company to cut my grass. They have been asked to cut the grass no shorter than 4" - preferably 6" - sometimes when it rains, dandelions 8" high seem to appear out of nowhere. They come out weekly. My back yard is a different story, as I have a garden that does have weeds, as well as herbs and veggies. A few years ago, the city came out to cut my grass and **caused damage**. This is unacceptable.

If the city has a problem and cannot discuss my yard like two rational adults, the city can fine me until they turn blue. If I am put in jail because I do not pull weeds fast enough, a great place to write an editorial. I will weed as often as I can - in the meantime, my lawn is not affecting others, as there is a fence along the property in the back and my Creeping Charlie/dandelions will stay, until my lawn is professionally landscaped.

1. TALL GRASS AND WEEDS: Immediately cut tall grass and weeds which have grown to a height of eight (8) or more inches or have gone to seed. The Saint Paul Legislative code requires that grass be cut and maintained at a height of under eight (8) inches.

I have containers for my compost bin and material from my construction. In addition, a charcoal grill. Until my balcony is finished, which should be by July 1st, there will be some wood and other materials in the back. They are all a

part of my restoration. None of my containers, rubble or wood is unsanitary. If there is proof otherwise, would like evidence.

1. SANITATION: Immediately remove improperly stored or accumulated refuse including; plastic, wood, metal, recycling materials, household items, building materials, rubble, buckets, etc., from yard. The Saint Paul Legislative Code requires all exterior property areas to be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition. Usable materials must be stored in an approved manner, so as not to constitute a nuisance.

Since I cannot appear in court, you have my testimony via email. It is not my intention to be difficult. The city has to get their facts straight and allow for landscaping imperfections. I am constantly improving my house and have receipts to show for all the work. I am very proud to live here and take excellent care of my home.

As I mentioned, having a meeting during the quarantine is unethical. While I can watch on TV (I think), there is no feedback. Attacking a woman without defense is not the way I would ever do business.

Carolyn

On May 29, 2020, at 12:16 PM, Privratsky, Matt (CI-StPaul) <Matt.Privratsky@ci.stpaul.mn.us> wrote:

Hello Carolyn,

Thank you for you detailed suggestions. I remember our conversation well. The council is not directly or actively involved in any lawsuits or the specific elements of court cases so I don't believe we will know any more than you do. But if we receive any information I will be sure to pass it along.

Matt Privratsky (he/him/his)
Legislative Aide to Mitra Jalali
Ward 4 - City Council

From: Carolyn Brandt <brandtcarolyn21@yahoo.com>
Date: Thursday, May 28, 2020 at 2:52 PM
To: #CI-StPaul_Ward4 <Ward4@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Cc: "Privratsky, Matt (CI-StPaul)" <Matt.Privratsky@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Subject: court date

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Hello Mitra

There is a court date the *first week of June* to discuss an excessive inspection on my property. Because of the virus, I am not sure how often you are retrieving messages, so emailing seems better. A voice message was left today and one can comment either through email or calling.

To re-cap previous discussions, Matt and I spoke about my situation without any answers, to the best of my recollection. We did not resolve my issues, which is not a good sign, as I worry how many others have been left in the dark. Therefore, I would like to offer suggestions and address this issue more extensively.

The city has a system, where complaints can be filed without any explanation, which is unfair. Every citizen has a right to know the problem. If bricks are being stored by the garage and the city complained about the height of grass, this is a problem. I was getting complaints, even when I hired someone to mow my lawn, so the whole experience left me scratching my head. It was not until someone came out and identified possible areas to improve, I had a better understanding of what the city expected. This could have been avoided, by providing guidelines to owners. A simple message that *educates*, not intimidates. Doing so offers preventive measures, so lacking in today's government.

This could be done in many ways. A simple letter that outlines a homeowner's responsibility. This guideline could be downloaded and used by residences to highlight problems of concern. If perennials seem too tall by one person's standard, this should be open for discussion. For the city to say that plants cannot cover a homeowner's address numbers is just plain unfair, when 20% of homes do not even have their numbers visible. Picking on a person for this reason shows unfair bias, which is unethical.

A mention of charges....I am willing to pay for your work, the time it took to discuss the matter, though \$157 seems excessive, especially twice. The amount of money is only part of the point. What is extremely disturbing is the government's approach, a way of communication that is destructive and wasteful. Extensive bulling in court is a Trump tactic that is harmful and does not solve problems. Elusive answers is not a form of justice.

As Matt and I discussed, there are other lawns that look worse than mine. I roamed around my friend's neighborhood in the Midway area and many lawns look unkept. This is not to say that many wrongs makes it right. I am not proud of the appearance of my lawn and will have this changed after my balcony is finished. I can only do one major project at a time. One should be given credit for my continual upgrades. Instead, the city continually harasses me with minor problems not bad enough to have a fine.

For example, it is helpful to know a hose cannot be left out on the lawn, though a very strange law. It is helpful to have a information that lists/shows nuisance "weeds", so they are managed. However, we all know certain species is subjective, like Creeping Charlie and dandelions. Since my lawn is organic, the city needs to provide some elasticity in their rules and I would like to know how this can be achieved?

Since the initial inspection, a compost bin was given to me for Christmas, which has helped greatly, though will not stop chipmunks and raccoons from roaming. I have extra dirt in my back yard, which is going to be taken soon, though do not have a timetable. So, I know there are some eyesores that will take time.

What really scared me was an attack on me when addressing me in court, as the woman in charge said I could go to jail. Is this really the way to settle problems? Especially those facts that are incorrect? She stated I do not have an exit in the back, since construction and I do. The lower door is used. There seems to be a problem with my upper door not being used, or blocked. There is another house in Highland Park that has a blocked off door and they are not getting harassed by the city.

While I am willing to learn, to grow as a homeowner, being attacked and threatened by the city is unethical and accomplishes nothing. Not changing the court date during a pandemic is unethical. I am not going to risk my life, because of unfair accusations, which lead to extensive fees.

It would be so easy to put complaints in the lap of those unhappy residents that can be sent anonymously. A form that can be sent to the city and resident. If still no response, then the city can take charge. This would save a great deal of taxpayer money. I do not like taking up time in court, when a small matter can be taken care of on a local level.

When I was in court and heard petting complaints about a walk not being shoveled wide enough or outdoor furniture not be covered, this was enough to make me cry. In all cases, the people were elderly. How difficult would it be to set up a committee to help these people? Strong arm tactics to the vulnerable or elderly is cruel. I am not sure if you ever sat through a couple sessions, I was truly distressed for those who are unfortunate. Enough to write a letter to publish in the newspaper.

What happened to the compassionate democratic party? Embarrassing. Frustrating. Especially after how the trash problem was handled. Mpls has a system more progressive and equitable, which I admire. St. Paul has the ability to be so much more.

Hopefully, my words will lead to something positive. Would appreciate an *update on the court hearing* and if there is anything that could be provided, since I will not be there.

Looking forward to hearing good news

Carolyn