

Saint Paul City Council
310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102
(Delivered by email)

Dear Council Members,

On July 15, 2020 you will be having a Council Organizational meeting to discuss a proposed Downtown Improvement District for a part of Downtown Saint Paul. You will be hearing from the advocates of this district and that will start a process of determining if you will allow a special assessment to be levied on a part of downtown Saint Paul. I urge you to ask the advocates several questions so that you can better understand what is being proposed, and how it will be unfair to many property owners in downtown Saint Paul.

First you need to ask them, why does this proposed "Downtown" Improvement District not include all of downtown Saint Paul?

If they are being honest, they will tell you that the majority of downtown Saint Paul commercial property owners do not support the proposal. They started out trying to do a real downtown improvement district and discovered that more than 50% of property owners felt that the proposal was not a high priority or, if useful at all, should be paid for via a normal tax process or voluntary fees for those who desire the service.

Second, why does the district include the area that it does?

The reason why the map looks so gerrymandered is that the building owners with a significant amount of square footage who support this proposal are located between 6th and 7th Streets, East of Cedar. Even though this service area appears to be for the western half of downtown, they needed to add in the area East of Cedar to capture additional square footage in order to impose this special tax on the western half of downtown.

Finally, to help you determine if this proposal is fair to building owners that lease space in the district, you have to ask the advocates what percentage of your petitions are from single use buildings and what percentage are from owners that will need to pass these costs on to their tenants?

From just a quick look at their petitions most of the support comes from single use buildings where a single corporation can determine if they feel comfortable with this fee, and these buildings contain well over half of the square footage of the proposed district. Owners like that don't have to worry about passing the cost onto tenants. What is worse is that most of the gerrymandered area east of Cedar that is added to this district is single use buildings.

This proposal misses the spirit and intent of Chapter 428 - Special Service Districts. The idea is to have a clearly defined area that desires certain services and are willing to impose a fee on themselves to have those services delivered. The majority of downtown Saint Paul building owners do not support the proposal. From the look of the map, and the petitions delivered, the advocates do not have enough support west of Cedar to create a special service district there, without adding the single use supporters they have East of Cedar Street.

If this district passes, most building owners west of Cedar will have a cost that they will have to impose on tenants. A cost that tenants will not have to pay if they lease space East of Cedar. In this tight office rental market even a few cents per square foot can make a difference. We shouldn't have this district with these costs imposed, if a majority of the buildings that lease space don't support the proposal.

I urge you to consider these issues while listening to the advocates' presentation.

Sincerely,



Dave Brooks
Downtown Saint Paul
Building Owner