

From: [Eric L](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul LH-Licensing](#)
Subject: LEGISLATIVE HEARING: SR 25-156 - The University Club of St Paul, dba The Commodore (79 Western Ave N)
Date: Friday, August 1, 2025 8:18:28 AM
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[79-N-Western Legislative-Hearing SR-25-156 2025-08-04.pdf](#)

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AUGUST 1, 2025. Please include this email and the attached .pdf file in the record for **Legislative Hearing SR 25-156** on **Monday, 8/4/2025 at 10:00 a.m..**

Mr. Rupp's Commodore bar and restaurant have been a popular and significant part of Saint Paul's history. Since 1992 I have lived close by and, four to six times each day and night, I walk my dog along Western Avenue next to or across the street from the Commodore parking lot. I support the EXISTING business with the EXISTING conditions as imposed by the City of Saint Paul. However, I have witnessed many near-miss driveway encounters and I **OPPOSE any potential increase in the number of non-resident customers** (i.e., non-Commodore Condominium residents) as long as the City of Saint Paul does not or cannot ensure that the existing driveway-related hazard is eliminated.

In early 2018, before COVID-19 and before the Commodore's bar and restaurant spaces were involuntarily closed to customers, I submitted the following testimony for the City Council Public Hearing **February 21, 2018, Agenda #47 ABZA 18-2 -- WEST ADDITION TO COMMODORE RESTAURANT:**

- **For future consideration:** *Traffic and vehicles in and close to the Commodore parking lot have created an existing, [incessant and hazardous](#) problem. As described by John O'Brien, **vehicles of non-residents frequently turn from Western Avenue into the Commodore's "garage access only" south driveway.** Upon finding themselves trapped, drivers are forced to back into oncoming traffic on Western. While backing across the city sidewalk (at high risk to occasional pedestrians), the drivers' line of sight is almost always blocked by cars parked on Western. I have watched it happen dozens of times. The near misses are especially exciting after dark...when Mr. Rupp's Commodore Bar and Restaurant attracts plenty of happy customers.*

In early 2020, the Commodore bar and restaurant spaces were closed for public gatherings. A bit later COVID-19 arrived.

- St. Paul Pioneer Press, 02/18/2020

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City ends Commodore dining room saga

Owner ordered to close area, pay fine, \$24,000

By Frederick Melo
fmelo@pioneerpress.com

On St. Paul's Cathedral Hill, the long-running saga of an illicit dining room in a revived 1920s-era restaurant finally wrapped up this month, and not in the restaurant owner's favor.

John Rupp, proprietor of the Commodore restaurant at 79 Western Ave., must close his westernmost dining area and pay the city a \$500 fine and more than \$24,000 in hearing costs related to the case, which recently went before a state administrative law judge.

On Feb. 5, the St. Paul City Council

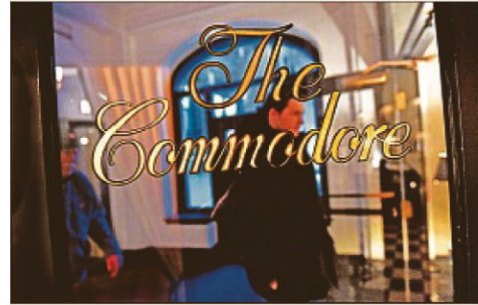
voted 5-2 to impose the nearly \$25,000 in charges, with Council Members Amy Brendmoen, Dai Thao, Mitra Jalali, Chris Tolbert and Nelste Yang in the majority and Council Members Rebecca Noecker and Jane Prince voting against the decision.

"I've been doing projects like this for 49 years," said Rupp at the time, while agreeing to close the room. "I've never had an experience like this in 49 years."

RENOVATED SPACE

Rupp has battled the city for five

COMMODORE SAGA, BA



JEAN PIERI / PIONEER PRESS

People enter the Commodore Bar and Restaurant in St. Paul in 2016. This month the City Council told owner John Rupp he had to close the facility's western dining room.

- In 2020 when the Commodore's non-resident customers disappeared, the "*incessant and hazardous*" traffic problem disappeared. With few or no non-resident patrons arriving by car, there were very few "garage access only" driveway incidents.

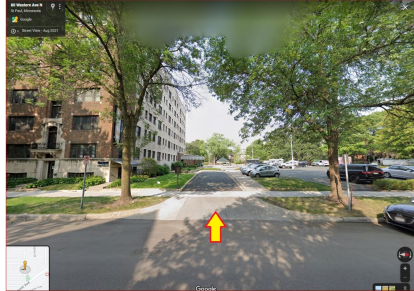
In December 2021, I submitted many of these same driveway-related comments plus the attached .pdf file as testimony for **ZF# 21-320-126**, 79 N. Western Nonconforming Restaurant Expansion.

As of August 2025, the hazardous driveway configuration has not changed and the proposed relaxation of existing license conditions seems likely to encourage a greater number of non-resident patrons. If the driveway remains as-is, the number of near-miss backing-into-Western-Avenue-traffic incidents is likely, at best, to increase. At worst, an accident could severely injure someone.

SUGGESTION & REQUEST: Before approving (license or zoning or other) changes that are likely to increase the number of non-resident patrons, **please ensure that the "garage access only" driveway has been reconfigured** so that confused drivers can safely escape their "Oops, wrong driveway!" predicament by driving forward and directly into the large parking lot. For years the existing dead-end driveway has repeatedly proved itself to be dangerous when combined with non-resident bar/restaurant patrons who are not (and cannot be expected to be) familiar with the facility's parking lot layout.

- The attached .pdf file contains daytime Western Avenue street view photos. Views include the Commodore's "garage access only" driveway (marked with a red/yellow arrow) that lies between the building and the large outdoor parking lot. The existing "Private Drive" signage is tasteful - but inconspicuous (especially at night).
- When approaching from the South and Summit Avenue, drivers are most likely to turn into the first (wrong/private) driveway, thus initiating a low-visibility backup maneuver across the city sidewalk and into Western Avenue's oncoming traffic. (*...near misses are especially exciting after dark...*)
- Please **"fix" - not aggravate - this (historic?) neighborhood hazard.**



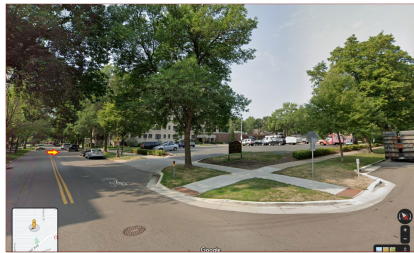




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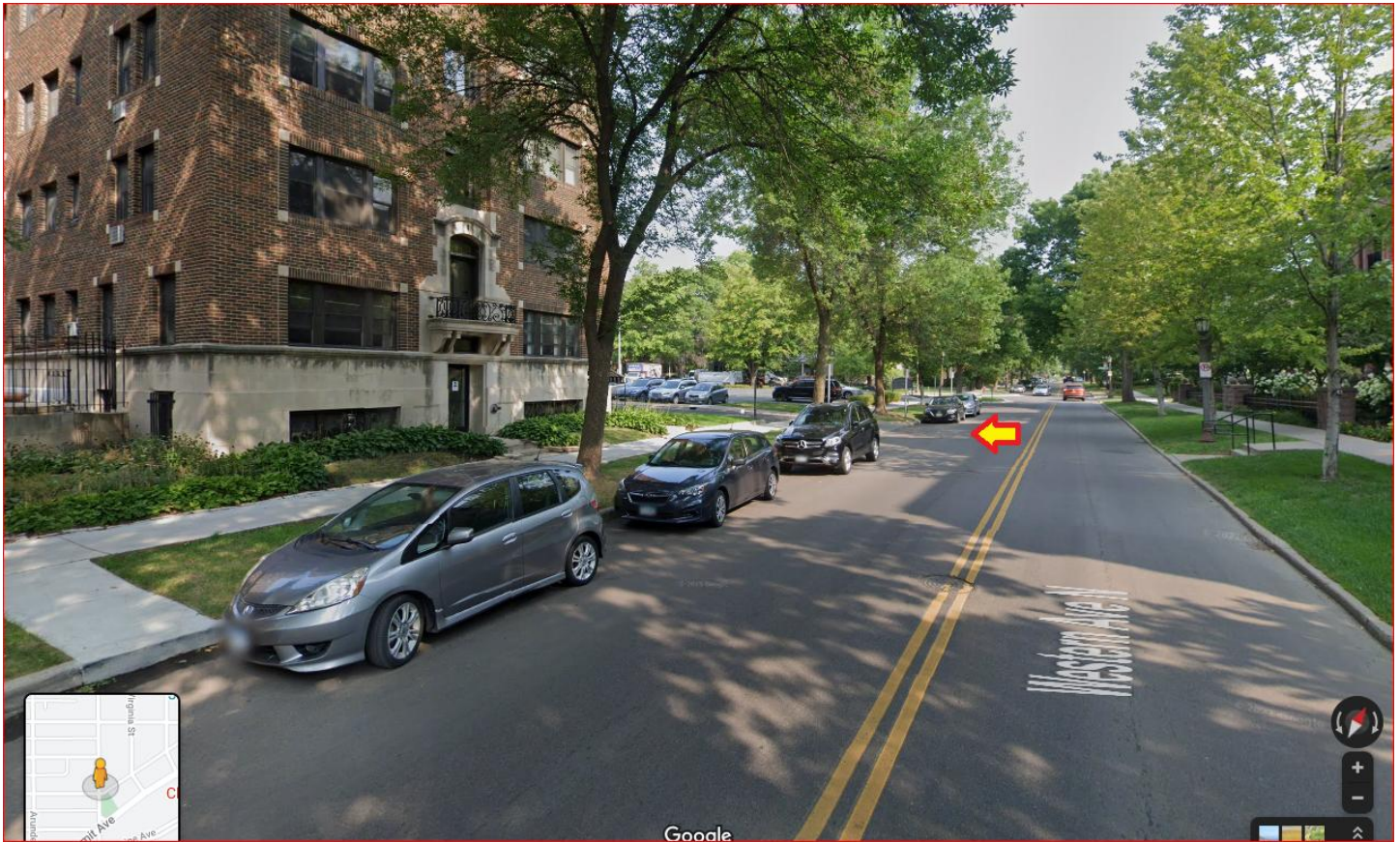
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Sincerely,

Eric Lein

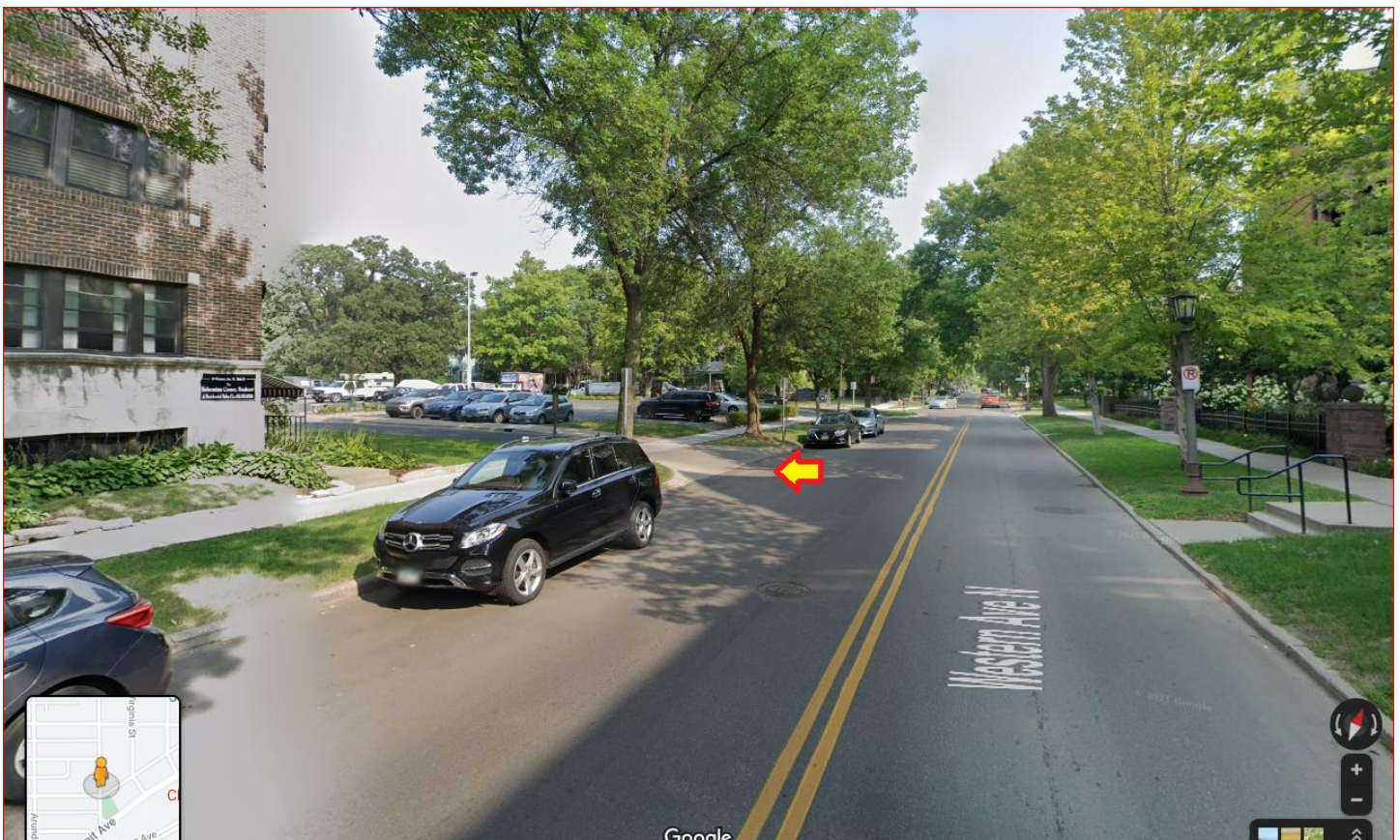
361 Summit Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55102

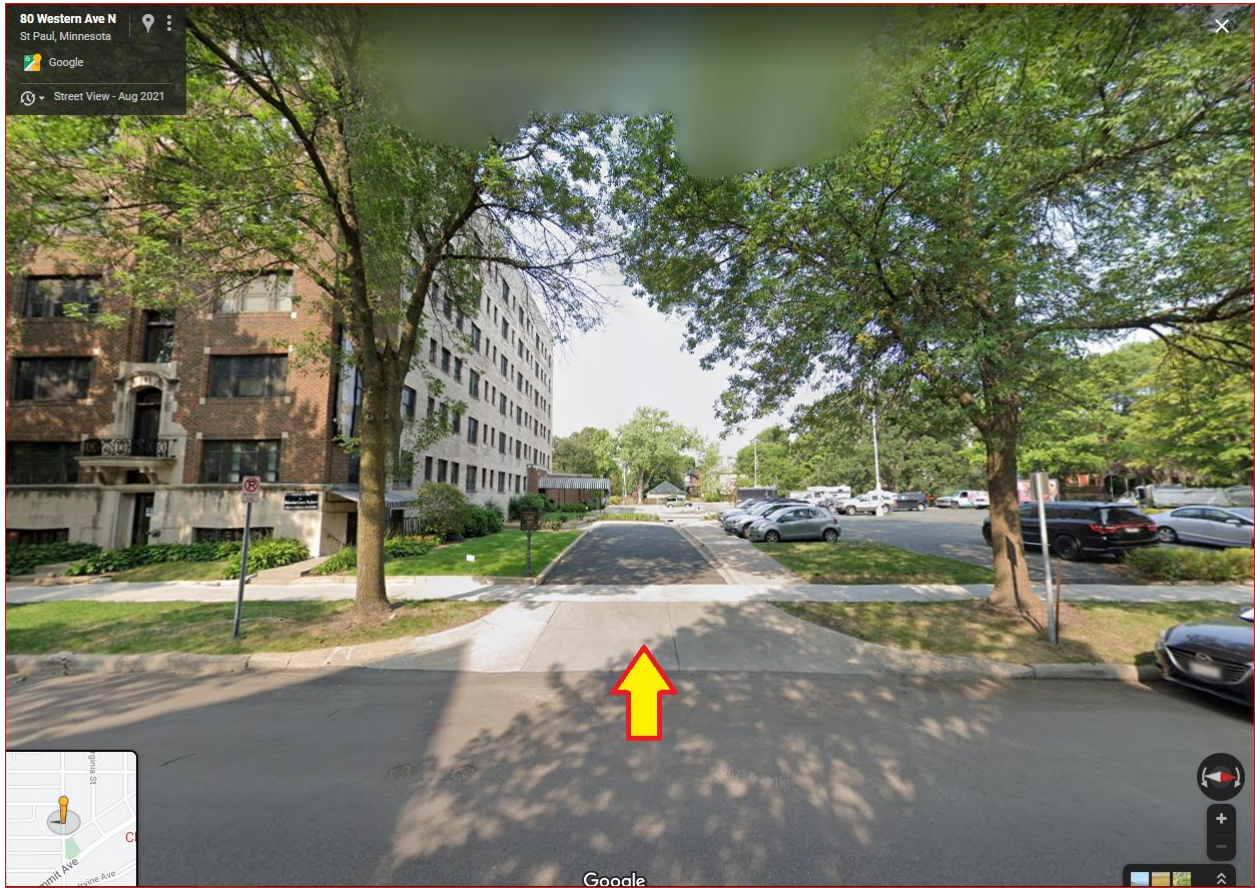
Neighbor - Less than 350-feet from the Commodore's Nonconforming Restaurant Expansion



Views when approaching from the South

“Garage access only” private driveway is first & obvious. Main parking lot driveway is obscured.





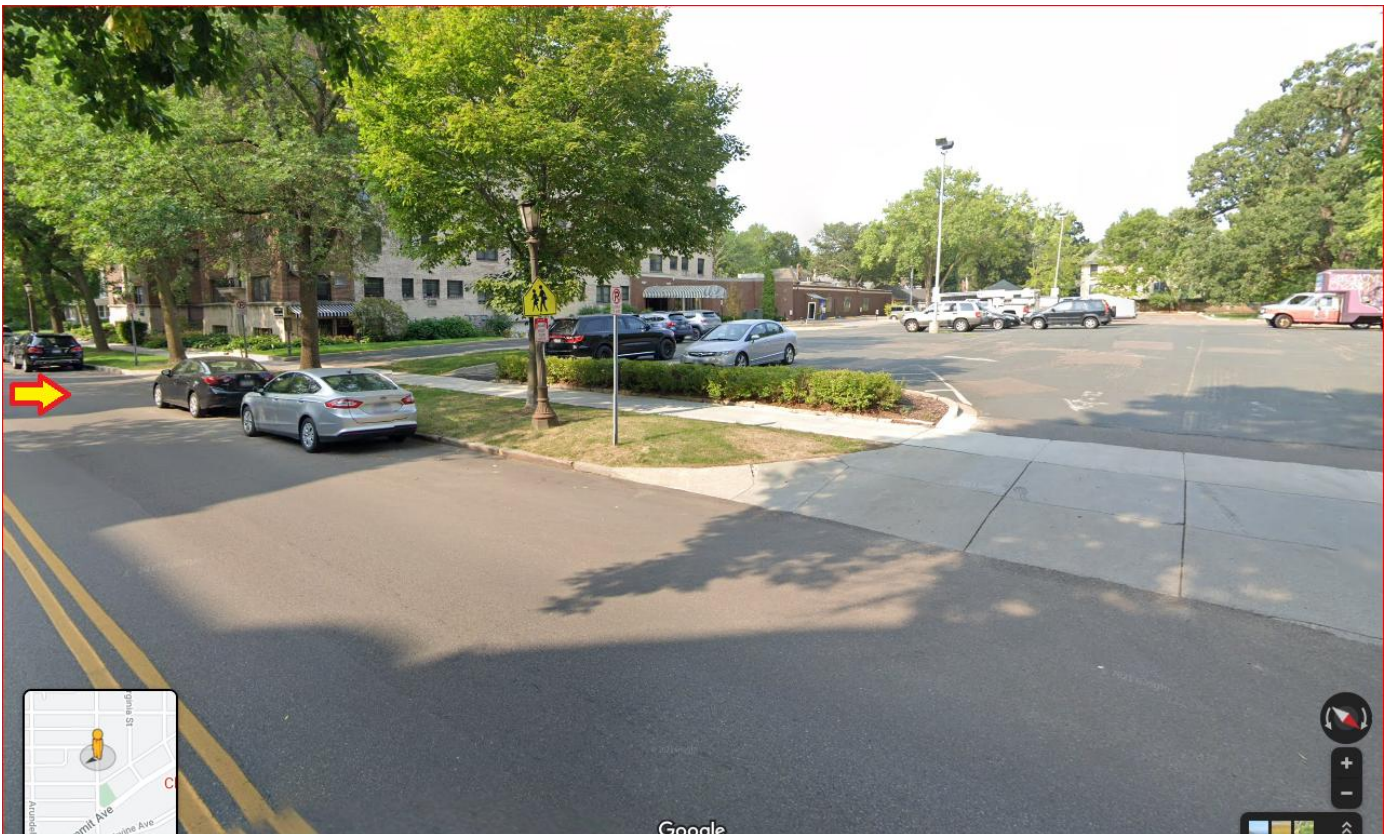
Private driveway – “garage access only”

The unlit sign (at left) is not easily noticed by drivers until after turning into this driveway.





Views when approaching from the North





Views when approaching from the North

Main parking lot driveway is easily visible.

