

SPAC Member Feedback on Signage Ordinance in Saint Paul

Collected January 2025 - July 2025

The St. Paul Area Chamber has spoken to members who have experienced challenges with the city's current signage ordinance and how it is being implemented. To respect their privacy, we have chosen not to identify them in this summary. However, if you are interested in connecting directly, we would be glad to help facilitate those conversations. These concerns highlight the barriers that affect our members' ability to effectively promote their businesses and contribute to a vibrant, thriving city.

Below is the feedback we have received from our members:

Cumbersome and Unclear Approval Processes

- Members continue to face significant roadblocks when pursuing signage approvals. Ordinances are often cited as protecting the "character" of downtown, but without clear guidance or consistent application.
- The process for even simple signage, such as window decals, has been described as egregiously complicated. One member reported having to submit separate applications for over a dozen decals, with full supporting documentation for each.
- Applicants are required to provide outdated or inaccessible documents, such as site plans that are decades old and no longer in their possession.
- Fees for signage, such as \$3 per square foot, add to the frustration, particularly when layered onto an inefficient process.

Inconsistent Application and Limited Communication

- Members are frustrated by inconsistent enforcement. Signage is allowed on some prominent downtown buildings (e.g., Union Depot, Landmark Center), yet others are denied similar requests without explanation.
- In several instances, city staff did not respond to questions, declined to offer workable alternatives, or cited broad reasons like "if we allow one, we'll have to allow everyone."



- In one case, a member was told a light post couldn't support a banner but was not provided with any follow-up or other options.
- Requests for high-impact signage (e.g., wallscapes or prominent building ads) have been rejected without clear reasoning, despite similar signage being approved or encouraged in other cities like Minneapolis.

Lost Opportunities for Business Visibility

- Members report missed opportunities due to delayed or denied signage permissions. One business has been waiting for years for a resolution after initially being told the City was "working on it."
- Some have attempted to work creatively, such as collaborating with nearby property owners to display signage, only to have those solutions fall through due to property changes or lack of city support.
- Several members have proposed signage and received positive feedback from city staff, but no action has followed.
- Members believe limited signage options are preventing St. Paul from competing with Minneapolis and other cities that embrace modern, vibrant signage to energize commercial corridors.
- Businesses and sports teams have expressed interest in creative signage to promote events and partnerships, but these initiatives are often blocked, resulting in lost revenue and missed promotional opportunities.
- Members emphasize that signage and advertising play a critical role in selling goods and services, yet the current ordinance restricts the tools needed to do so effectively.

