



West 7th / Fort Road Federation

395 Superior Street

Saint Paul, MN 55102

651.298.5599

www.FortRoadFederation.org

February 11, 2025

Zoning Committee

Saint Paul Planning Commission

ZoningCases@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Subject: Letter Regarding Nonconforming Use Permit Application, 237 Richmond

FILE # 25-007-238

Hearing Date: February 13, 2025

Members of the Zoning Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the West 7th/Fort Road Federation to express opposition to the reestablishment of the nonconforming use permit application for 237 Richmond Avenue. The property is currently zoned T1 (Traditional Neighborhood), a designation intended to foster compact, higher-density, walkable neighborhoods with a compatible mix of commercial and residential uses. This proposed use as a private auto shop does not align with the goals and character of the surrounding neighborhood and should be denied. It is important to note that this property had been previously rezoned to T1 in 2011 as part of the District 9 Rezoning Study. The intention of the rezoning was that if the previous auto shop ever closed, the property could be reevaluated for a conforming use.

The prior use of 237 Richmond as an auto body shop served neighbors and functioned as an amenity within the community. It provided a direct service to local residents, moreso aligning with the intent of a Traditional Neighborhood district. However, the proposed use as a private auto shop does not serve the broader community and fails to contribute to the walkability and vibrancy of the area. Instead, it runs counter to the objectives outlined in the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, particularly:

- Policy LU-31: Investing in Neighborhood Nodes to promote development that enables residents to meet daily needs within walking distance and improves equitable access to amenities, retail, and services.
- Policy LU-33: Encouraging amenities that support those who live and work in Neighborhood Nodes, including vibrant business districts and neighborhood-scale civic and institutional uses.
- Policy LU-36. Promote neighborhood serving commercial businesses within Urban Neighborhoods that are compatible with the character and scale of the existing residential development.

A review of the required findings further supports denial of this application.

- **The structure, or structure and land in combination, cannot reasonably or economically be used for a conforming purpose:** While the existing structure was originally built as an auto repair station, alternative conforming uses should be explored rather than continuing a nonconforming use that does not benefit the broader community.
- **The proposed use is equally appropriate or more appropriate to the district than the previous legal nonconforming use:** The proposed service business with a workshop does not

The Fort Road Federation coordinates participation in advocacy and planning and builds community connections for the residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations of the West 7th neighborhood so that it is a place where people want to live, work, and play.

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contribute to a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use environment as encouraged by T1 zoning. The previous use as an auto repair shop at least provided direct services to local residents, while the proposed business primarily serves off-site work, reducing its role as an active neighborhood amenity.

- **The proposed use will not be detrimental to the existing character of development in the immediate neighborhood or endanger public health, safety, or general welfare:** While operational restrictions may mitigate some disruptions, the nature of the business does not align with the pedestrian-oriented vision for this area. The potential for noise, vehicle traffic, and industrial activities negatively impacts the residential and commercial fabric of the neighborhood.
- **The proposed use is consistent with the comprehensive plan: This proposal contradicts key policies within the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, particularly:** This proposal contradicts multiple policies within the comprehensive plan, particularly those aimed at fostering neighborhood nodes and walkable communities as noted above.

Given these factors, we strongly urge the Zoning Committee to deny the reestablishment of the nonconforming use permit application for 237 Richmond Avenue. Preserving the intent of T1 zoning is critical to ensuring a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, and amenity-rich neighborhood that serves the interests of all residents.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at 651-298-5599 or julia@fortroadfederation.org.

Sincerely,



Julia McColley
Executive Director

CC: Councilmember Rebecca Noecker

Zoning Case # 25-007-238
237 Richmond Nonconforming Use Permit

Susanne Pierce and Brian Pierce
447 St. Clair Avenue
Monday February 10th, 2025

Dear Council Members,

I am a lifelong resident of West 7th, District Area 1. My husband and I have owned and lived in the property adjacent to 237 Richmond Street for 40 years. Additionally, we have lived in this community our entire lives and have seen many changes over the decades.

I request that you deny the request of reestablishment of nonconforming use as a service business with a workshop at 237 Richmond Street.

We have perspirant and ongoing issue with the business currently established at this location.

1. Trash and construction debris left on the ground and transferred from trailer to trailer.
2. Concrete cement debris splashing over and through the privacy fence and degrading our property and vehicles.
3. Working men peering over the privacy fence while working.
4. Intoxicated people.
5. Excessive noise and banging at all hours of the day and night.
6. Lack of basic maintenance of the property.
7. Public urination in the parking lot of the business location in question.
8. The use of equipment.
9. These are just a few of the issues.

We have tried to speak with the business owner to resolve these issues with little to no results.

I feel uncomfortable and unsafe in my own yard because of the current zoning permissions for this location. Please help restore this area to a thriving, peaceful community, where I can feel comfortable sending my young grandchildren around the block on scooters. Where I don't have to worry that they will be hurt by dangerous sidewalks, heavy machinery or confronted by intoxicated people. Please reject this request and help restore the peace and quiet to our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Susanne Pierce

P.S. In preparation for this hearing the property has been cleaned up, trailers have been removed and debris has been cleaned up.

From: [Darren Tobolt](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul_ZoningCases](#)
Subject: Opposition to Non-Conforming Use Permit for 237 Richmond
Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2025 10:57:50 PM

You don't often get email from darrentobolt@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Members of the Zoning Committee,

I write the email to oppose allowing a Non-Conforming Use Permit (NCUP) for 237 Richmond. My wife and I have lived on this block since 2008. We appreciate living in a thriving pedestrian neighborhood. I am a frequent user of the Saint Clair bus stop and I was excited to see the station area plans that will come with improved transit on West 7th Street. The proposed NCUP stands in opposition to the progress being made to improve the walkability of this neighborhood.

I disagree with the idea that an operations and maintenance facility fits with the "commercial activity" visioned for the Saint Clair/West 7th Commercial node mentioned in the 2040 Comprehensive plan. The staff report cites **Policy LU 6** "...building and expanding neighborhood economic and cultural assets through the development of the local micro-economies of our Neighborhood Nodes" and **Policy LU 31** "...development that enables people to meet their daily needs within walking distance and improves equitable access to amenities, retail and services." This node includes a transit stop, a grocery store, several destination restaurants, the best coney dogs in town, and other pedestrian focused businesses. Please help us build on those assets, not a use that will make our node noisier and more dangerous for neighbors and visitors.

Finally, I would like to call out **Policy LU 36** cited in the staff report that says the city should "Promote neighborhood serving commercial businesses within Urban Neighborhoods that are compatible with the character and scale of the existing residential development." This use does not serve our neighborhood and it is surely not compatible with the character or scale of our block. This property sits on a block that is entirely residential with a jumble of backyards and no alley. The building and fence sit awkwardly close to the neighboring houses.

Respectfully,

Darren Tobolt
212 Colborne St
St Paul MN 55102

February 11, 2025

St Paul Department of Planning & Economic Development
Attn: Zoning Committee
City Hall Annex, 25 West 4th Street, Suite 1300
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Subject: Objection to Reestablishment of Non-Conforming Business Use at 237 Richmond St
Zoning Case # 25-007-238

Dear Members of the Zoning Committee,

We, the surrounding residents, were recently made aware that the nonconforming use permit for 237 Richmond Street is up for renewal. As members of this neighborhood, we strongly encourage you to consider denying the renewal of the nonconforming use for this property and return it to residential use only.

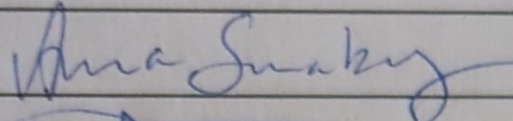
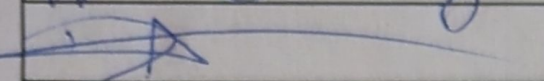
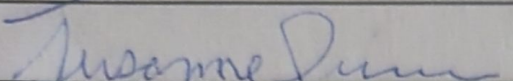
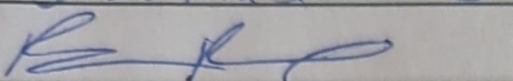
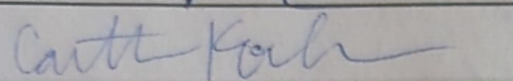
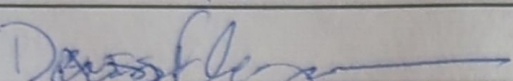
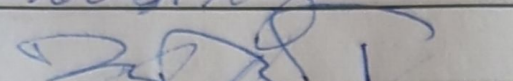
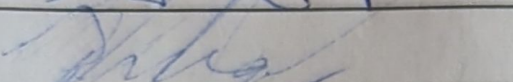
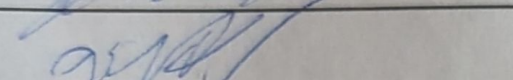
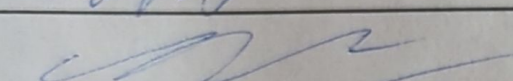
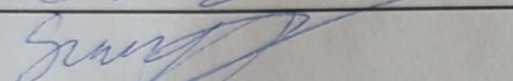
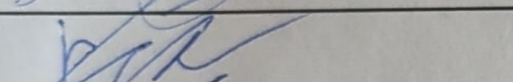
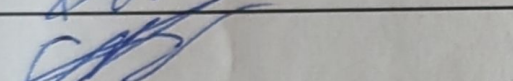
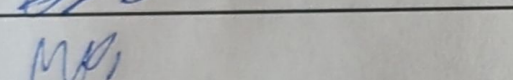
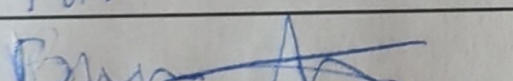
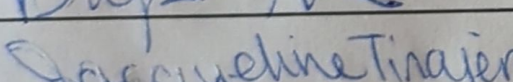
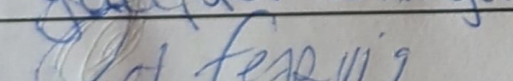
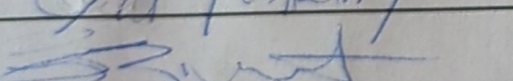
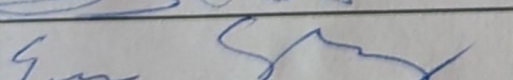
The commercial use at 237 Richmond Street detracts from the neighborhood in significant ways, including:

1. Increased traffic and parking along Richmond Street due to the operations of the business, making it less safe for pedestrians and particularly for the many children in nearby houses.
2. Increased wear and tear on the street (and associated potholes) resulting from the increased traffic, particularly heavy trucks that come and go from the construction-based business currently operating out of the property.
3. Cars from the business frequently block the sidewalk along the west side of Richmond Street, making foot traffic more difficult and dangerous.
4. Increased noise from business operations (truck loading/unloading, material moving, etc.), particularly for the properties directly adjacent to 237 Richmond Street.
5. Increased litter (empty bottles, wrappers, etc.) on the ground by the business, detracting from visual appeal of the street.

All of these factors not only impact the safety of the neighborhood, but also the neighborhood feeling and property values. We strongly urge the Committee to consider these factors and deny the request for renewal of the non-conforming business use at 237 Richmond Street. The integrity of our residential neighborhood should be preserved for the well-being of all residents, and we believe it is in the best interest of the community to return this property to its original residential use.

Sincerely,

The Neighbors of 237 Richmond Street
Attachment: signatures of neighbors

Signature	Name (print)	Address (Optional)
	Anna Swanberg	217 Richmond St
	Dane Breinkust	225 Richmond St
	Susanne Pierce	447 St. Clair Ave
	Brian Pierce	447 St Clair Ave
	Caitlin Koehler	228 Colborne St.
	Davis Flanagan	228 Colborne St.
	Darren Tobolt	212 Colborne St
	Quinn Combs	454 Michigan
	Aaron Hyers	234 Colborne
	Elton Hyers	234 Colborne
	Sydney Gregersen	234 Colborne
	Kim Hyers	
	Dean Hyers	
	Malissa Palcizaca	
	Bryan Tinajero	452 St Clair Ave
	Jacqueline Tinajero	452 St Clair Ave
	Al FEARING	439 ST CLAIR
	ZOE BREINKUST	225 Richmond St
	Eric Swanberg	217 Richmond St

From: [Wendy Underwood](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul_ZoningCases](#)
Subject: Opposition to Nonconforming Use Permit Application, 237 Richmond
Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2025 7:29:48 PM

You don't often get email from wendylunderwood@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

February 12, 2025

Zoning Committee
Saint Paul Planning Commission
ZoningCases@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Subject: Opposition to Nonconforming Use Permit Application, 237 Richmond

Dear Chair and Members of the Saint Paul Zoning Committee,

I write to you in opposition to the proposed NCUP at 237 Richmond. This parcel is zoned T1 and has been for many years following an extensive District 9 Residential Zoning Study. West 7th / St. Clair is deemed a Neighborhood Node by the city, and this parcel's T1 zoning aligns with this long-term intent. Just down the block from this property are other future residential and mixed use opportunities. It is a perfect location for new housing in a neighborhood that is extremely accessible for people requiring transit, access to services and amenities, and more, which is reflected in its current T1 designation.

I share concerns with my neighbors about the lack of community engagement around the potential new non-conforming use. There is no mention in the staff report of the required number of signatures collected to support the change. The entire surrounding area is residential with land lots of varying sizes, no alley, and residential property across St. Clair; this zoning impacts many children, families, and seniors in the area. The description of what is to occur on the site is vague and does not reflect its past non-conforming use. The past non-conforming use, a neighborhood auto body shop, was an amenity and very different from a concrete truck business and storage facility. I worry about noise, road safety, and air quality, none of which are addressed in the staff report. Regarding hours of operation, the staff report contradicts the operating hours described in the applicant's cover letter, which is also concerning.

The closure of a longtime neighborhood business at this location allows for the property to be used as it is intended in today's era which is the point of long-term area planning. Instead of allowing a concrete truck business to move into a residential neighborhood and disrupt the intentions of Neighborhood Node designation and District 9 planning, please use this opportunity to drive investments in residential and community development that fits with the character and scale of our great neighborhood.

Thank you so much for the time you give this Committee and to the Saint Paul Planning Commission.

Wendy Underwood
212 South Colborne Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102

From: [Dani Oulman](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul_ZoningCases](#)
Subject: Zoning case 25-007-238, 237 Richmond
Date: Tuesday, February 11, 2025 8:20:09 PM

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Hello,

I am writing as a neighbor and adjacent property owner of 237 Richmond street. My family and I own our home at 195 Richmond street and have lived happily in our neighborhood for nearly 13 years. We also own and operate a local business (The White Squirrel Bar.)

It's come to my attention that some of our fellow Little Bohemians don't want the city to renew the zoning variance for the property in question. I disagree. When we moved in, we knew we were moving down the street from a small industrial garage, which at the time serviced cars and was open to the public. Magic's Auto served our community. When the building sold we assumed it would be another mechanic shop. Instead it's basically a storage and hub for landscapers. This is an even lighter use than previous.

If the current owners lost this zoning variance, they will absolutely have to lose the property and will more than likely be forced to sell at a loss. I think most people understand that would likely be detrimental for them. I admit I have no real knowledge of them other than that they are working year round and primarily Latino people (I'm assuming this is a minority owned business.) I would absolutely hate for people working in my community to unnecessarily lose their livelihoods because some neighbors don't like that they store equipment there. I think their use of the space seems minimal and appropriate.

Furthermore, changing the zoning to residential would have a significant impact. I'm assuming that environmental remediation would be required on top of an already costly demolition and new construction build. This makes no sense to me when our economy is in its current shape. It just doesn't seem like a reasonable thing to do.

I am a neighbor in support of the non-conforming zoning renewal because I am in favor of supporting small, minority owned businesses. For decades and long before we moved to this neighborhood, 237 Richmond street was engaged in this non-conforming use. Let them be.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Danielle Oulman
195 Richmond Street 55102

From: [Kim Hyers](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul_ZoningCases](#); [#CI-StPaul_Ward2](#); fortroadfed@fortroadfederation.org
Cc: [darrent tobolt](#); megduhr@gmail.com; [Dean Hyers](#)
Subject: 237 Richardson opposition
Date: Tuesday, February 11, 2025 4:53:52 PM

[You don't often get email from kimhyers@icloud.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Dear Councilmember Noecker, Zoning Committee and Fort Road Federation,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed variance for the use of 237 Richardson.

First, let me be clear, my family and I were NOT contacted about the property by the owner, despite the owner's claims of having reached out for support. We do not support this business use. A commercial permit that brings more traffic, heavy equipment and likely, loud noise, is not welcome, and is not a benefit.

I live on the block, just 2 doors down. See pic, the home circled in red has been my home since 2010. My husband and I have lived there for 15 years, and raised our two children there. We have invested over \$100,000 in this property in upgrades and repairs to bring it back to its former beauty as a single family home. For the first 5 years, we had people walking by regularly and stopping to thank us for what we did for the house, and for the neighborhood, by investing our time and money into what could have easily been a 3 -4 unit rental. See before and after pics - this is what our neighborhood is about. My neighbor across the street, Meg Duhr, my neighbor on the next corner, Darren Tobolt - they have also invested in this community by restoring and maintaining beautiful classic 1800's single family homes. This is a neighborhood, it is a community.

The neighborhood has changed a lot in 15 years, for the better. We now see people pushing strollers, walking dogs, using the soccer area at the rec center, and an influx of great neighborhood small businesses like restaurants, yoga / workout studios, and salons - boutiques and small businesses that bring amenities to our neighborhood, and bring welcomed foot traffic to the area. The adult video store is long gone, replaced by a lovely neighborhood coffee shop. Even the Liquor Barrel has gone from selling malt liquor in paper bags to transients, to carrying a selection that the owner occupant residents are asking for, and buying.

We have worked hard to clean up our neighborhood. When we moved in, there were two multi-unit rental properties within a block that were frequent targets of police drug raids and near constant criminal behavior day and night. The week I moved in there was a shooting at W. 7th and St. Clair. Many homes were high turn rentals. Through vigilance, and the support of neighbors, we have created a much safer place for families, and improved property values. Continuing to add amenities and create a safe environment is the direction we should be going.

What we do not need is zoning that permits businesses that, frankly, don't belong there.

There are dozens of options along W. 7th toward and the river 35E that would accommodate a truck repair facility if location is a factor. Our streets, particularly Richardson, are not built to withstand the weight of heavy vehicles, you can see the cracking and buckling of side streets from the minimal traffic they get today on Richardson, Michigan, Colborne.

Commercial traffic is a safety issue for our children, and our pedestrians. No matter how careful a driver may be, a child can dart out and be hit and killed in a blink. These heavy trucks do not belong in a residential setting. This would never be approved, or even proposed in a Woodbury family neighborhood, or even a St. Paul neighborhood just 'up the hill' on St. Clair.

We lost the Schmidt Brewery retail complex and the blow was devastating to the neighborhood, leaving a retail and entertainment gap. What we need more of is small, neighborhood focused businesses that puts 55102 back on the map as a vibrant community.

Decisions like this are not stand-alone. When you open up zoning for one out-of-place property, you create a future loophole for more. What could be a small bistro, daycare, coffee shop or barber shop is being proposed as a construction repair site. Does this really fit the neighborhood? It does not. Is this how we want to support our residents and retail/service business owners who have invested in the area? We should think strategically here.

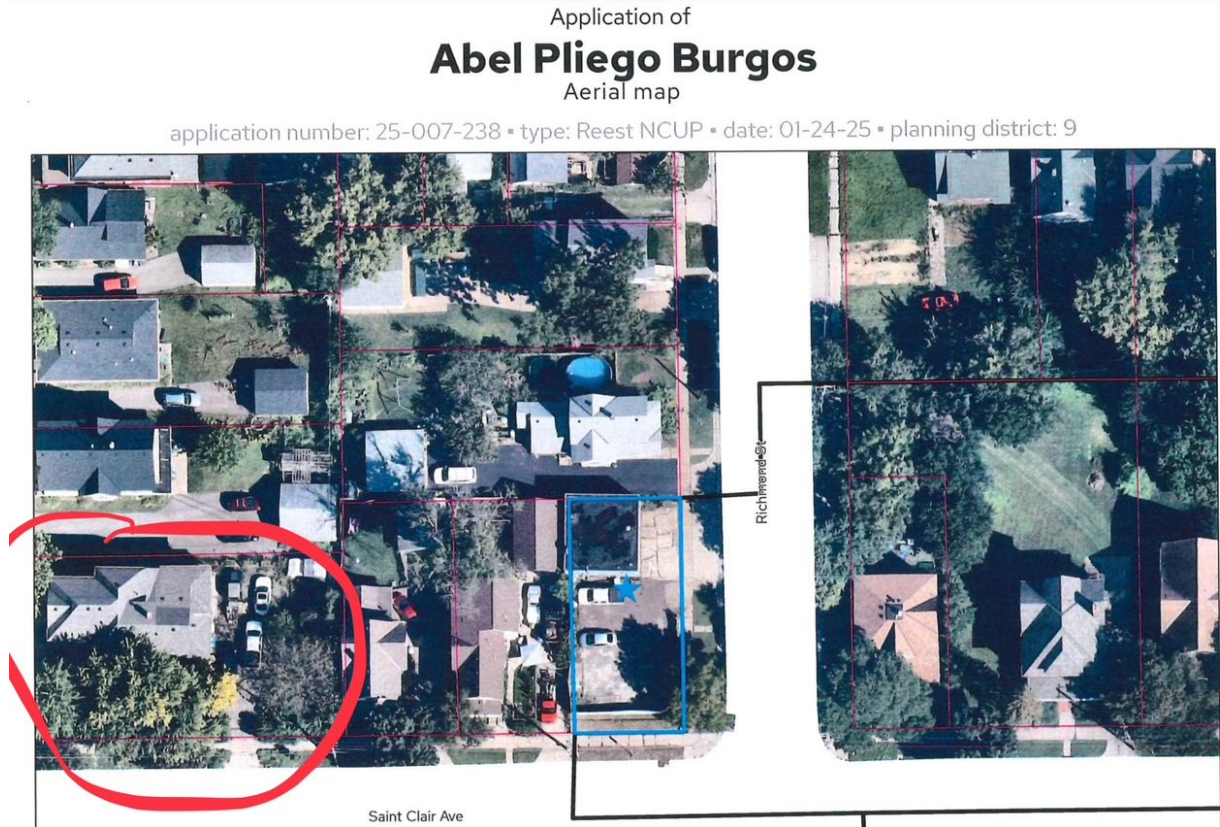
We do not support the zoning request.

Respectfully,
Kim Hyers
651-216-9551

From: Kim Hyers
To: *CI-SIPaul_ZoningCases; #CI-SIPaul_Ward2; fortroadfed@fortroadfederation.org
Cc: darrent.kobolt; msoduhr@gmail.com; Dean Hyers
Subject: Re: 237 Richardson opposition
Date: Tuesday, February 11, 2025 5:24:05 PM

[You don't often get email from kimhyers@icloud.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Resending images:



234 Colborne Street circled in red, proposed zoning variance in blue box.
Below before during and after restorations at 234 Colborne.





>

> On Feb 11, 2025, at 4:53 PM, Kim Hyers <kimhyers@icloud.com> wrote:

>

> Dear Councilmember Noecker, Zoning Committee and Fort Road Federation,

>

> I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed variance for the use of 237 Richardson.

>

> First, let me be clear, my family and I were NOT contacted about the property by the owner, despite the owner's claims of having reached out for support. We do not support this business use. A commercial permit that brings more traffic, heavy equipment and likely, loud noise, is not welcome, and is not a benefit.

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>
> Decisions like this are not stand-alone. When you open up zoning for one out-of-place property, you create a future loophole for more. What could be a small bistro, daycare, coffee shop or barber shop is being proposed as a construction repair site. Does this really fit the neighborhood? It does not. Is this how we want to support our residents and retail/service business owners who have invested in the area? We should think strategically here.
>
> We do not support the zoning request.
>
> Respectfully,
> Kim Hyers
> 651-216-9551

From: Mcianchette@comcast.net
To: [*CI-StPaul_ZoningCases](#)
Subject: 237 Richmond St
Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2025 6:35:46 AM

You don't often get email from mcianchette@comcast.net. [Learn why this is important](#)

Please do not change zoning/license issues for the business at 237 Richmond. The company has been kept clean, quiet and has established themselves as a responsible neighbor. We have lived in this neighborhood for 25 years and have seen no obvious negative impact of this company. This business should be allowed to stay at 237 Richmond St, St Paul.

Thanks for your consideration.

Martha and Dan Cianchette
184 Richmond St
St Paul MN 55102