

**LICENSE HEARING MINUTES**  
**Minipac LLC, dba Minipac, 1184 Maryland Avenue E**  
**Monday, December 16, 11:00 AM**  
**Room 330 City Hall, 15 Kellogg Boulevard West**  
**Nhia Vang, Legislative Hearing Officer**

The hearing was called to order at 11:02 AM

Staff Present: Jeff Fischbach, Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) Licensing Inspector; Frances Birch, DSI Zoning Inspector (remote participation)

Licensee: Tareq Alajrami, Applicant/Owner; Maher Safi, Property Manager

License Application: Gas Station and Tobacco Shop licenses

Legislative Hearing Officer Nhia Vang made introductory comments about the hearing process: This is an informal legislative hearing for a license application. This license application required a Class N notification to inform neighbors and the District Council about the application and provide them with an opportunity to submit comments. The city received correspondence of concern/objection, which triggered this hearing.

The hearing will proceed as follows: DSI staff will explain their review of the application and state their recommendation. The applicant will be asked to discuss their business plan. Members of the community will be invited to testify as to whether they object to or support the license application. At the end of the hearing, the Legislative Hearing Officer will develop a recommendation for the City Council to consider. The recommendation will come before the City Council as a resolution on the Consent Agenda; the City Council is the final authority on whether the license is approved or denied.

There are three possible results from this hearing: 1) a recommendation that the City Council issue this license without any conditions; 2) a recommendation that the City Council issue this license with agreed upon conditions; or 3) a recommendation that the City Council not issue this license but refer it to the city attorney's office to take an adverse action on the application, which could involve review by an administrative law judge.

Minutes:

Jeff Fischbach, Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) - Licensing, gave a staff report for licensee Minipac LLC, (License ID# 20240001961), d/b/a Minipac, located at 1184 Maryland Ave E. The application is for Gas Station and Tobacco Shop licenses. DSI is recommending approval with the following license conditions:

LICENSE CONDITION #1 PER CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT (CUP) #03-351642

1. The hours of operation of the car wash are limited to no more than from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

ADDITIONAL LICENSE CONDITIONS #2 - 4

2. Access to the car wash from the alley is prohibited. The car wash can only be accessed via the drive lane (immediately south of the building and located entirely on this property). The licensee shall take appropriate actions to ensure vehicle access from the alley to the car wash does not occur.

3. Temporary window signs placed between the height of four (4) to seven (7) feet above grade shall not cover more than thirty (30) percent of this window space area and cannot block views into the clerk or cashier station.

4. License holder will create a video surveillance camera and lighting placement plan (video surveillance plan) for the interior and exterior of the licensed premises. License holder will submit the video surveillance plan to the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD) liaison with the Department of Safety and Inspection (DSI) for review and approval. In accordance with the approved video surveillance plan, license holder will ensure that video surveillance camera system is in good working order, ensure it is recording 24 hours per day, ensure it can produce recorded surveillance video in a commonly used, up-to-date format, and ensure that accurate date and time of day are visible on all recorded video. License holder will retain surveillance video for a minimum of thirty (30) days. If an incident is deemed serious by SPPD, License holder shall make surveillance video immediately available for viewing by SPPD. If a copy of the surveillance video for a serious incident is requested by SPPD, license holder shall have the technology, materials and staff available to immediately make the copy. In all other cases, license holder shall provide a copy of the surveillance video to the requestor within 48 hours.

The District 5 Payne-Phalen Planning Council submitted an email acknowledging receipt of the application. Building conditions, N/A; License approved with conditions; and Zoning approved with conditions.

Hearing Officer Vang: Is there a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) on this dating back to 2003?

Fischbach: Yes. It was to add a car wash to an already existing gas station.

Hearing Officer Vang asked if the applicant understood and agreed to the conditions listed on the Class N Notification.

Tareq Alajrami: Yes.

Fischbach: He has signed the conditions affidavit.

Hearing Officer Vang: Condition 4 has to do with security cameras, and has an appointment already been scheduled with DSI's police liaison.

Fischbach: Correct. They are scheduled to visit the site this Thursday between 11:30am and 12:30pm. The applicant is aware.

Hearing Officer Vang asked about the Zoning review.

Frances Birch, Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) - Zoning, gave a staff report. The area is zoned B2 – Community Business. This is a permitted use. (conditional use permit) (defined tobacco product shop license, does not apply here)

Hearing Officer Vang asked the applicant to talk about the business: history, hours of operation, number of employees, etc.

Alajrami: I used to manage this business from 2018 until earl 2020. I then bought a gas station in Burnsville, then sold that and bought one in Circle Pines, and then sold that in 2022. Right now, the

only other business I have is an actual smoke shop. I do not plan to change the operation of this gas station. The tobacco will only be cigarettes like other gas stations. Without that license, it would be hard to own the business. We won't have flavors or anything and will comply with City laws.

Hearing Officer Vang: You said you have a smoke shop?

Alajrami: Yes, in Mahtomedi. That is the only business I will own besides this gas station.

Hearing Officer Vang: What will staffing look like?

Alajrami: No one is hired yet. I'm going to manage the gas station myself until everything is organized and then hire a manager.

Hearing Officer Vang: Are you open now or closed?

Alajrami: Closed. I want to rebrand and clean before reopening.

Hearing Officer Vang: How long has the business been closed?

Alajrami: Three weeks. We can't order tobacco without the tobacco license. On Friday though, they told me they can send me products once we're on process with the application. Once it arrives and I have the license, we will be ready to open.

Hearing Officer Vang: Tobacco will be placed behind the counter, right?

Alajrami: Yes. It will be all the way back close to the wall.

Hearing Officer Vang: How many pumps will there be for gas?

Alajrami: 3 dispensers, 6 pumps. Marathon/Mobile is the supplier.

Hearing Officer Vang: How are the cameras placed?

Alajrami: They are on the exterior and interior. We have at least 27 cameras. Our system can handle up to 32 cameras. They cover the car wash, entrance, exit, parking lot... We have special cameras for license plates that allow for zooming in on each vehicle to read it and save them. We're going to cover the alley and have two cameras behind the cash register.

Hearing Officer Vang: Is the parking lot fenced and striped?

Alajrami: It's not fenced. It is striped.

Hearing Officer Vang: Are you buying or leasing the property?

Alajrami: Leasing.

Hearing Officer Vang: How will trash disposal be handled?

Alajrami: Trash bins are located in the southeast corner and are fenced and gated. I believe it is locked as well. The only side not fenced is Duluth.

Fischbach: The packet has a picture of the gate.

Alajrami: A camera will cover that area directly. Trash pickup will happen once a week. We need the trash bin to be large since we use it a lot.

Hearing Officer Vang: I see a garage bin in one of these photos. Is that associated with the business or the next-door home?

Alajrami: It's for a neighbor, I think.

Hearing Officer Vang: How will you handle deliveries?

Alajrami: They will come through the parking lot. Picture 2 shows that area and we have a delivery door on the side of the building. Deliveries of gas will be once a week and other deliveries will likely be every 2 weeks.

Hearing Officer Vang: For lighting, I see a streetlight and some extra lighting.

Alajrami: Lighting is all around the building. By the parking lot we have two huge wall lights, which are shown in one of the pictures. By the entrance for the car wash we have lighting as well. There are about 12 LED light canopies around the property in all.

Hearing Officer Vang: Is this all existing or new?

Alajrami: It's all existing. We won't be doing anything new.

Hearing Officer Vang: I'm trying to see where the objector lives. Maybe a half-block away?

Alajrami: I think the objector misunderstood what this business is. We will not be a tobacco product shop that functions as a smoke shop. She mentioned two smoke shops nearby, which is accurate, but that's not what we will be. I tried contacting her to explain that, but she didn't answer.

Hearing Officer Vang: It looks like you indicated that on this handout that you shared.

Hearing Officer Vang next read into the record the letters of objection from Judi Burkhart, which voiced concerns about tobacco products. She then gave the applicant the opportunity to respond.

Alajrami: There were traffic concerns as well. I can't do anything about the street, where sometimes people cut through the parking lot.

Hearing Officer Vang: How will you manage that?

Alajrami: There's nothing I can do about that. I can't stop people.

Hearing Officer Vang: When it gets to be problematic, I encourage you to monitor that to avoid accidents.

Alajrami: It's not a huge issue. I'm familiar with the area from my time managing this location.

Hearing Officer Vang: Who is the person next to you?

Maher Safi: I am here representing the landlord. I work for SDX Services. We manage properties and do some advertising. I'm here if you have any questions about the property.

Hearing Officer Vang: What is your responsibility and what is the tenant's.

Safi: We have a 5-year \$10k per month lease. The tenant will be responsible for trash, snow, landscaping, and other things outside. The owner is responsible for the structure, the roof, property insurance, and making sure taxes are paid. Regarding the alley, the concrete block done by the City has helped to make sure people don't cut through the parking lot.

Hearing Officer Vang: Is the lease signed and does the City have a copy?

Safi: Yes. He purchased from the previous owner who was struggling. Alajrami purchased the business after some issues with the previous owner. The property got broken into and is undergoing repairs for things like copper wire theft and broken water pipes. All permits have been applied for and there is a general contractor with Commercial Systems. He's hired the plumbers and electricians. Things might be done in 2 weeks.

Alajrami: 2-3 weeks, probably. Water finished today. Once we receive all our products, I will be open.

Hearing Officer Vang: How many people will you hire?

Alajrami: There will staffing to cover two shifts.

Hearing Officer Vang: What will your hours be?

Alajrami: We will be open 7 days per week. From Monday – Friday our hours will be 6am – 10pm. On Saturday and Sunday our hours will be 7am – 10pm. The car wash will always be 8am – 8pm

Hearing Officer Vang: The entrance to the car wash is located on Duluth and vehicles can only exit out on Maryland, correct?

Alajrami: Yes.

Hearing Officer Vang: Did you have any noise complaints about the car wash when you were managing?

Alajrami: No. It only holds one car at a time. It's very small. The entrance stays closed until the car inside has exited the booth.

Hearing Officer Vang: Looking at the history report, it looks like a lot of complaints were about noise from the car wash and idling delivery trucks, which I want you to be aware of. They are listed

in the STAMP activity report. The report also has snow and ice complaints. How will you handle snow?

Alajrami: We will plow it into a parking space unless it gets to be so much that we need snow removal.

Hearing Officer Vang: I also encourage you to be aware of graffiti, as well as the police incident report. If theft is an issue, I think adding cameras will be helpful. I also encourage you to get to know your neighbors and the district council.

Alajrami: One neighbor also reached out directly to me and asked for certain items to be supplied. I have good relationships with that community. They know me. We need the community to stay in business.

Hearing Officer Vang stated that after reviewing the records and considering the testimonies from all parties, she will recommend to the City Council that they approve the license with the following agreed-upon conditions:

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The hearing adjourned at 11:40 AM.

The Conditions Affidavit was signed and submitted on December 2, 2024.