From: Scott Berger
To: *CI-StPaul_Contact-Council; #CI-StPaul_Ward1; Melvin Carter
Subject: Public Comment: Tenant Protections and Rent Stabilization Amendments
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Dear Councilmembers and Mayor Carter,

Regarding tenant protections, I have personal experience with landlords operating slowly or in bad faith particularly for the return of security deposits. I would propose ordinance changes to make landlords even further disincentivized from making bad-faith arguments regarding security deposit expenses returns (such as for alleged cleaning, repairs) or going beyond the statutory period for return of the security deposit. Few tenants will use these administrative tools, so the fines or penalties need to be significant and painful to even big landlords that don't follow reasonable regulations. As for other proposed tenant protections, I will only say that I hope these proposals will not act as further disincentives for developers to build and renovate additional housing in our city, which desperately needs both housing and additional tax base.

I also understand that you are planning to hold a vote on May 7 regarding amendments to the Rent Control ordinance as passed by voter ballot initiative, implemented by the city, and then later amended. I am speaking as a non-landlord who simply wants the city to thrive. I understand that you intend to propose an exemption of new construction from the existing Rent Control policy. While I think this is on the right track, like previous softening amendments, I don't think it's the right move because it doesn't go far enough. I also note that developers are fearful of uncertainty regarding other potential waffling changes into the future, so we should make clear this is a settled topic, once repealed.

Exempting new(er) construction from these arduous and administrative headaches, means that by extension you are NOT exempting older construction, which makes up some 83% of rental units in the city. This, then, has the effect of penalizing the older property owners only, while effectively giving an unfair advantage to owners of newer, and potentially more expensive rental units. This is fundamentally unjust, as you can see.

Back in 2021, I delved into a number of rent control studies before forming a strong, educated opinion. Study after study made it quite clear that rent control can help present tenants for a while, but it ultimately hurts the majority of tenants in the long run as new units coming online are restricted. This is exactly what we are observing now in our city.

Although a plurality of voters did narrowly pass the ballot initiative on unpragmatic strict rent control in our city--in fact arguably the strictest such ordinance in the nation--it has been (predictably) revealed to have been a misguided policy from day one. It is incumbent on our leaders to know when the popular opinion on a micro scale is having demonstrably harmful effects to our city on a macro scale. That is why you, our elected officials, must act in the best interests of the people to **repeal the rent control ordinance entirely**.

I therefore urge you to hold a robust discussion at the Council regarding not putting a clumsy and inequitable Band-Aid on the misguided Rent Control policy, but to repeal it altogether. Let's use other means to boost affordability and fairness for our renters.

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