



Greater East Side Community Council

October 23, 2025

Board of Zoning Appeals

Subject: Opposition to the Proposed Installation of a Military-Grade Fence at the BCA St. Paul

On behalf of the Greater East Side Community Council and the residents we represent, we are writing to express our strong opposition to the proposed installation of a military-grade fence at the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) office on Maryland Avenue East. We believe such a measure is unnecessary, inappropriate for our community, and sends a troubling message to our residents. We are also very concerned about a project of this magnitude and potential impacts to the neighborhood proceeding without conversation or engagement of the neighborhood organization.

The BCA St. Paul office is located in a predominantly residential area. We have not been made aware of any specific, credible threats that would necessitate this level of fortification. We question if the proposed fence is disproportionate to the actual security needs of the building and the neighborhood.

The installation of a large, imposing fence would detract from the aesthetic quality of our neighborhood. A military-grade fence sends a clear message of separation and exclusion. It suggests that the BCA is not a part of the community it serves but is instead an entity to be feared and kept at a distance.

We urge you to reconsider this proposal and explore alternative security measures that are more appropriate for a community setting. We are committed to working with the BCA to ensure the safety of its staff and the public in a manner that does not come at the expense of our community's well-being and sense of place.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical issue.

Lisa Theis
Executive Director
Greater East Side Community Council



Opportunity Neighborhood – Ames Lake

12/26/25

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Opportunity Neighborhood and the residents we serve at Ames Lake Neighborhood in St. Paul, I am honored to express our full support for the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension's (BCA) fencing proposal.

The BCA has been a long-standing and deeply respected partner within our community. Their commitment extends well beyond their role in law enforcement they are trusted neighbors who actively invest in the health, safety, and joy of our families. Over the years, their contributions have included organizing drives to provide much-needed items for children, hosting annual holiday celebrations complete with gifts and visits from Santa, and opening their facility for one of the largest National Night Out gatherings in St. Paul.

These actions have left a lasting and meaningful impact. The BCA's efforts help foster a sense of dignity and belonging, especially for the underserved children and families we work with every day. Their generosity, accessibility, and responsiveness make them a vital part of our neighborhood fabric.

The proposed fencing improvement would preserve essential pedestrian access points for residents while enhancing safety for nearby businesses and community gatherings. This thoughtful balance reflects the BCA's consistent approach to neighborhood engagement always working with, not just in, our community.

At Opportunity Neighborhood, we believe that what makes a neighborhood strong is not just the buildings within it, but the hearts and partnerships that animate it. The Bureau of Criminal Apprehension exemplifies this spirit, and we are proud to stand beside them in support of this proposal.

Sincerely,

Chantrea Chamrong, Executive Director

David Eide

From: Ian Houmas <midwaygg@msn.com>
Sent: Friday, December 19, 2025 4:50 AM
To: David Eide
Subject: BCA fence

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Think Before You Click: This email originated outside our organization.

David,

The community does not want to this fence. Community engagement was nonexistent from the BCA, even though it says there was.

District Council has written a letter in opposition as well. A military-grade fence however ornamental is still militarizing my neighborhood.

The BCA has not been a good neighbor. They fill the curved corridor with employee parking and fill the grocery store lot, opposed to using the parking lot they wish to fence off.

Please advise what next steps to continued opposition to this installation.

Ianni Houmas
651-210-1936
Midwaygg@msn.com

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David Eide

From: Ianni Houmas <iannid2p@outlook.com>
Sent: Friday, January 2, 2026 6:49 PM
To: *CI-StPaul_DSI-ZoningReview
Subject: BCA: 1430 Maryland Avenue East

Categories: FWD'ed

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Dear Members of the Board of Zoning Appeals,

I am writing as a resident of Saint Paul to express my strong opposition to the variance request submitted by the State of Minnesota for a 10-foot perimeter fence 1430 Maryland Ave. (BCA site). After reviewing the State's recent submission and the history of this application, I believe the variance should be denied for several reasons.

1. The Applicant Is the State of Minnesota, Not a Private Property Owner

In their own documents, the State makes clear that they are not subject to municipal zoning authority and are only "voluntarily" participating in the City's zoning process. This is important because:

- The City cannot compel the State to comply with local zoning.
- Yet the State is still seeking the benefit of a variance that would allow them to exceed the rules that apply to every resident and property owner in this neighborhood.
- Granting a variance to an entity that is not bound by the zoning code sets a troubling precedent and undermines the purpose of local standards.

If the State is voluntarily entering this process, they should be held to the same expectations as everyone else.

2. The BZA Already Declined to Vote on September 15, 2025

The Board's decision not to vote at the previous hearing was meaningful. A non-vote meant:

- No variance was granted, and
- The project could not move forward as proposed.

The State's resubmission for the January 5, 2026 hearing does not resolve the concerns raised by residents or the Board. The same issues remain, and the same outcome — denial — is appropriate.

3. The Fence Height Far Exceeds What the Zoning Code Allows

The zoning code permits a maximum fence height of 4.5 feet in this district. The State is requesting:

- An 8-foot fence, plus
- A 2-foot retaining wall,
- For a total of 10 feet, more than double the allowed height.

This is not a minor variance. It is a significant departure from the standards that shape the character and safety of our neighborhood.

4. The State Has Not Demonstrated a Practical Difficulty

Under Minnesota law and City ordinance, a variance can only be granted when the applicant demonstrates a practical difficulty that:

- Is unique to the property,
- Is not created by the applicant, and
- Does not contradict the intent of the zoning code.

The State has not met this standard. Their request is based on preference, not necessity. They have not shown that a 10-foot structure is the only feasible option.

5. The Fence Would Harm the Character and Experience of the Neighborhood

As a resident, I am deeply concerned about the impacts of this project:

- A 10-foot barrier creates a harsh, fortress-like appearance that is incompatible with nearby homes and public spaces.
- It reduces visibility and walkability along a corridor used by families, students, and neighbors.
- It reinforces a long pattern of large-scale state projects being placed in this area without adequate community consideration or mitigation.

The State has not meaningfully engaged with residents or offered alternatives that would reduce harm while meeting their operational needs.

6. Upholding the Zoning Code Protects the Community

Granting this variance would:

- Undermine the integrity of the zoning code,
- Create a precedent that state agencies can bypass local standards, and
- Disproportionately impact a neighborhood that has already absorbed more than its share of state and regional infrastructure.

As a resident, I am asking the Board to uphold the zoning code and protect the character, safety, and wellbeing of our community.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully urge the Board of Zoning Appeals to deny the variance request for the proposed 10-foot fence at the BCA site.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Ianni Houmas

Ianni Houmas,
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