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Sent: Monday, July 18, 2022 10:05 PM

To: planner@savmn.com

Subject: Public Hearing July 19, 2022 Fences

We have been active members of the St. Anthony community since we bought our house at 3312 Skycroft Dr. in 1991, over 31 years ago. Lori served on the Village fest planning committee for several years organizing and operating both the silent auction and kids games. She also organized and operated kids games at the St. Charles Fun Fest for many years. Rob served as a VP of sports boosters for over 10 years and was an active member of the St. Anthony Chamber of Commerce for many years serving as president for two years. We have coached many youth sports teams, served on the boards of other St. Anthony based nonprofit organizations and continue to volunteer in the community. We also have a large network of friends we have developed over the years in St. Anthony. Many of those friendships span our entire 31 years as residents of St. Anthony. Our three children all attended St. Anthony public schools from kindergarten through high school graduation. We are very tied to this community and plan to continue living here for many years to come. We are interested in helping to make it a better place to live and raise a family.

The mission of St. Anthony is, "To be a progressive and welcoming Village that is walkable, sustainable and safe". This request needs to be viewed with that in mind. For various reasons, fences support that mission. For instance, they are sometimes necessary to keep pets in their place. In our own instance, we have a fenced in backyard for that very reason. Except for the past few months, we have always had one or two small dogs. In the past few years, we have added small signs reminding people to close the gates so that our dogs do not get out of their yard. However, as a general rule, fences are not welcoming. The bigger they are, the less welcoming they are. Fences of an appropriate size help to keep people and pets safe. However, there is no problem building a fence that complies with the current rules and still keeps people and pets safe. It would be very easy to use four foot materials and, if you want a fence 5-6 feet tall, add some sort of decorative elements across the top to get additional height.

Tall wooden fences also have a negative impact on safety. They limit our ability to see what is going on in our neighborhoods. Public safety advocates have a saying, "see something, say something". Tall fences limit our ability to do that.

Tall wooden fences are also not welcoming. Can you imagine a backyard surrounded on three sides by 7 foot wooden fences? It would be like living in a box. That is hardly welcoming. With the lot sizes we have in St. Anthony, boxing them in with tall fences should be avoided. This proposed change needs a lot more thought before it is seriously considered. It may very well make more sense to reduce the allowed fence height rather than increasing it.

The staff memorandum in this case is confusing. It creates the inference that fences of less than 6 feet in height do not require a building permit. It says, "When this code was written, fences of more than 6 feet in height required a building permit, with review and permitting through the Building Official. The revised building code has changed this height to 7 feet." It also includes a reference that, "Technically, such fences were required to obtain building permits, be reviewed by building inspection staff, and be inspected by the building official. In practice, this was not happening...". The inference is that fences shorter than 6 feet do not require a permit. My reading of the St. Anthony code is that all fences require permits. Section 150.071 says, "A building permit is required for the construction or alteration of a fence, and for any additions to a fence. The permit must be obtained in the name of the owner of the property on which the fence is or will be located." I cannot find anything that makes an exception for fences under any particular height. This confusion makes it difficult to adequately comment on the requested change. At the very least, this matter should be set over for future consideration after this confusion is clarified.

If there is going to be a change to §150.071, that is a much more significant issue that is not appropriate to determine at this time. All fences should require a permit. Fences not only have a significant visual impact, they also affect the perceived property lines, require maintenance and can create other problems. Residents desiring to build a fence over 5 feet tall should be cautioned about finding the correct property line and having the ability to maintain the fence. This can happen in the permitting process. Fences create a lot of issues. They are worth the effort to monitor and have the rules enforced. We have worked hard to make our home attractive and welcoming to our family and friends. We take pride in maintaining it at a high level. We have a large front patio where we can greet and meet people who are walking along Skycroft. We have a large paver patio in the backyard with a grill, multiple tables and seating for about 15 people. We also have a fire pit in our backyard or we often sit and enjoy pleasant evenings with friends and family. A couple of years ago we added a swing set to accommodate our new grandson. We get a tremendous amount of joy spending time, playing games and conversing with family and friends in our backyard. It backs up to the high school parking lot. When we first moved in, we received permission from the school district to put in a gate so that we have direct access to the school and Central Park. We added landscaping along the fence so that we believe it gives us just the right amount of privacy but still the opportunity to talk with people walking by. It is a place that we enjoy tremendously. Tall fences significantly reduce the enjoyment we get from our backyard. If the city is going to make a change, it should reduce the allowed fence height. Fences are significant structures that impact our properties. They should be carefully monitored.

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