



Minneapolis
City of Lakes

Cam Gordon

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Council Member Cam Gordon's Report to Southeast Como, 3-1-11

Cam's next Southeast Como Office Hours:
Tuesday, March 8th, 9:30-11:00am
Muddsuckers Coffee, 1500 Como Avenue SE

Items:

- 1) New Como Office Hours Location: Muddsuckers
- 2) Solar Energy Systems
- 3) Dynamic Signs
- 4) Holding Problem Landlords Accountable
- 5) Tiered Rental Licenses
- 6) Green and Healthy Housing
- 7) CDBG Funds for Southeast Block Nurse Program
- 8) Liquor Store Spacing
- 9) Openings on City Boards and Commissions

- 1) Due to SECIA's move from the storefront office you have occupied for the past seven years at the corner of 15th and Rollins, I am, sadly, moving my office hours for the Como neighborhood to **Muddsuckers Coffee**, 1500 Como Avenue SE. Como office hours occur every **second Tuesday** of the month, from 9:30-11am. Muddsuckers asks that everyone who comes to office hours makes a purchase. Still, I hope to visit the SECIA's new office often, and thank you all so much for your hospitality. I will miss the monthly visits with SECIA staff a great deal.
- 2) The Council has approved a new solar energy ordinance that defines and sets standards for building mounted and freestanding solar systems and makes clear that solar access easements may be purchased by property owners. For the first time, it provides specific guidance to the Planning Commission that existing solar energy systems should be given special consideration if and when a proposed development would shadow them. Some amendments from the Council improved the proposal by raising the percentage of a residential lot that could be covered by a freestanding system from 3% to 5%. This means that for a standard 5,000 square foot city lot, the maximum allowable freestanding system went from 150 s.f. to 250 s.f. The committee also chose to completely do away with lot coverage maximums for commercial and industrial parcels. I believe that both of these amendments were steps in the right direction. My staff worked with solar advocates and City staff on an amendment that would clarify that "passive" solar systems would be included in the protections we're giving to other types of solar systems. These include systems that are specifically intended to capture and store direct solar heat, but are not broad enough to allow any window to be considered a "passive solar" system.
- 3) The Council has adopted new regulations regarding "dynamic signs," signage that incorporates large LCD TV-style screens. For the most part, I support these new standards. However, the Council also undid some good work from the Zoning and Planning committee. The committee, acting on a motion I made, voted to restrict these new signs from Pedestrian Oriented (or PO) Overlay Districts. Unfortunately, the Council majority voted to strip out those protections on an 8-5 vote. I believe that dynamic signs are not in keeping with the intent of PO districts. They are clearly aimed at drivers. Tellingly, the only types of businesses that have approached the City looking to install these signs are gas stations. This restriction was also in keeping with the existing signage regulations in PO districts. We already prohibit "pole signs, backlit awning and canopy signs and backlit insertable panel projecting signs" in PO districts, because these signs are aimed primarily at drivers, just like dynamic signs. Ignoring all of this, the Council majority voted to eliminate these protections for PO districts. They even rejected a compromise that would have allowed new dynamic signs in PO districts at sites that currently have manually changeable electronic signs.

If you need this material in an alternative format, please contact Matt Bower at (612) 673-2188 or Matthew.Bower@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.

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- 4) The City has launched a new website (<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/inspections/accountable.asp>) that posts the names of property owners who have had their rental licenses revoked, properties condemned or demolished, and those who have been ruled ineligible to hold a rental license for five years. Since 2005, the Council has changed more than **two dozen** ordinances to strengthen rental licensing and property ownership standards to protect tenants from problem landlords. Because of these changes, the City has increased the number of rental licenses it has revoked by more than **500%** for owners who have violated one or more rental license standards. I am very supportive of holding these problem landlords accountable, and thank Inspections staff for building this site.
- 5) Regulatory Services Housing Inspection Services staff have come forward with a new “tiered” inspections plan for rental license inspection schedules based on the conditions and maintenance of rental properties. Rental properties/license will be divided into 3 tiers based on criteria developed with input from stakeholders including rental property owners, tenants, neighborhood associations, City Council, Police, and the city attorney's office. The criteria includes: excessive nuisance conditions; excessive housing code violations; a history of non-compliance; and excessive police calls. The program is expected to be launched this April.
- 6) The Council's Regulatory, Energy and Environment committee has voted to recommend an ordinance change that would improve our ordinances in terms of making rental property safer, healthier, more economical and more environmentally sustainable. If adopted, these changes would require that landlords protect their tenants in the following ways. All landlords would be required to do a furnace/boiler safety test by a licensed mechanical or gas contractor every within two years of their regularly scheduled inspection. Owners of single family rentals with code violations related to involving lack of weather stripping around windows or exterior doors, loose-fitting windows, water damaged surfaces that appear to be caused by loose-fitting windows or doors or holes or breaches in the foundation or roof, or lack of or loose-fitting storm windows or storm doors would be required to get an energy audit with a blower test and thermal scan by a certified auditor. If property fails the initial blower door standard, air sealing must occur resulting in at least a 20% improvement on the initial blower door test or attic bypasses and major air leaks discovered by the thermal scan must be sealed. Also, all owners of 1-3 unit rental properties built before 1978 where the City has found chipping or peeling paint would be required to get a lead safe clearance test by a third party lead certified technician. All of these changes are within the City's appropriate role of protecting tenants, and all will increase the livability, safety and health of our housing stock.
- 7) The Council has awarded a \$75,000 Community Development Block Grant to Living at Home/Block Nurse programs in Southeast, Longfellow/Seward, and Nokomis.
- 8) The Council voted on a very close, 7-6 margin to approve Council Member Meg Tuthill's proposed ordinance changing the spacing requirements for liquor stores from schools and religious places of assembly. The old rule was that new liquor stores couldn't go in within 300 feet of a school or church, as measured from the front door of the liquor store to the front door of the school or church. What passed changes the way that the 300 feet is measured to be lot-line to lot-line. I found this vote problematic for three main reasons. First, the proposal changed between the Regulatory Energy and Environment (REE) meeting and the Council meeting and did not include information I needed to make a good decision. The original Tuthill amendment would have changed the measurement from the front door of the liquor store to the lot line of the school or church. The Council received no information from staff about the amendment's potential limitations on locations for new liquor stores. At the very least, we should have seen a map that would indicate which sites will become ineligible for new liquor stores due to this change. With the large number of mosques, synagogues, temples and churches as well as school in and commercial zones the new law could conceivably eliminate all of the roughly 8 remaining areas where a liquor store could be located in the city. Second, I was disturbed that this ordinance appeared to be aimed at one particular proposed liquor store. Third, I wanted to see some evidence to show that proximity to a liquor store and a place of religious assembly and school created real problems that would make it in the public interest to regulate further. While I have heard anecdotal evidence that liquor stores do lead to complaints and concerns about inebriants I was also generally supportive of changing the measurement away from using the doors, which can easily be changed, to property lines and appreciated that the Minneapolis Public School district was supportive of the changes. So, for these reasons I voted to send the proposal back to committee for more work but, when that failed, voted against it. Both votes were on a 7-6 margin.
- 9) There are openings on the Animal Care & Control Advisory Board, Capital Long-Range Improvement Committee, Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities, Latino Advisory Committee, Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission, Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Planning Commission, Public Health Advisory Committee, Advisory Group for Redistricting 2011-2012 of the Charter Commission, Senior Citizens Advisory Committee, Thinc.GreenMSP Steering Committee, Workforce Council and Zoning Board of Adjustment. To apply, call (612) 673-3358 or email cityclerk@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.