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JUL 19 2023

CITY CLERK

-----Original Message-----

From: "Bill Hosko" [bill@billhosko.com]

Date: 07/18/2023 12:35 PM

Subject: Too typical political behavior which continues in Saint Paul... a shakedown of local businesses...

Greetings all,

Wherever you are and whatever is going on in your lives currently, I hope life is as pleasant as it can be for you. Here in Saint Paul, we're having a good old-fashioned summer.

I am doing well. The gallery has been busy on the framing end of things, the cafe I chose a number of months ago to not reopen and recently, I was out at my high-plains, far northern little Montana spread (some photos from past years attached) to mow lots of grass (risk of wild grass fire out there begins soon), do a bit of painting and to trim a few trees and shrubs.

In the meantime, below, please find glimpses of ongoing 'politics' in Saint Paul. Most people, who once elected to public office, fall into the trap of thinking their knowledge and behavior is superior and above reproach. Ours, are classic, text-book cases.

Further, there has been no reply to my communications below by our elected 'leaders' being they know that they can largely get away with misconduct if we have little 'curious' news media or civic organizations willing to lead in their stead. So, for many, many years now the lives of countless people in Saint Paul have been, and continue to be, negatively impacted. I am so very sorry about this.

More details about the gallery and other local topics that may be of interest to you next week.

Cheers

Bill Hosko

CC Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter, Ward Two Councilmember Rebecca Noecker

-----Original Message-----

From: "Bill Hosko" [bill@billhosko.com]

Date: 07/13/2023 02:51 PM

To: rebecca.noecker@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Subject: Pressure been placed upon West 7th business and property owners to contribute \$\$\$ to city-funded Downtown Alliance...

Dear Councilmember Noecker,

Before I share concerns about the apparent shakedown of West 7th Street business and property owners, two months ago, I contacted you and Mayor Carter, twice, asking why city pressure was applied to our downtown Lunds grocery to reopen their front doors - which had been closed for months at that point to help limit a serious and growing shoplifting situation. It is a disgrace that Lunds now has to have a full-time police officer inside to keep staff and customers safe. Neither of you replied nor acknowledged receipt of these emails. Copies of those emails are below.

I understand you are currently working with Joe Spencer, director of the Downtown Alliance, and his request that business and property owners along near West 7th Street contribute money to his organization, which in turn would offer litter cleanup, graffiti removal and particularly, increased security protection. Is this true?

When did the city first begin giving his organization funding, how much has this funding totaled to date and what are the city's future plans for giving him more funding? Can you share the contractual agreements the city has with the Downtown Alliance and what its subsequent reports to you have been, including the salaries of its director and his employees? Prior to his current position which he and you created, Mr. Spencer worked in Mayor Chris Coleman's office, as Saint Paul's 'Director of Arts and Culture'. A position which you approved his salary funding, correct?

As the Downtown Alliance has been recently seeking contributions, of many thousands of dollars each, from the property and business owners along near West 7th Street, retired Police Chief Todd Axtell has been involved in making the requests. Is this true? If so, how is he being compensated?

I understand, being some property and business owners have not complied with the apparent shakedown, and your efforts to expand the Downtown Alliance's boundaries beyond (one third of) downtown may subsequently be in jeopardy, you and Mr. Spencer are working together on city council legislation that would force them to participate. Is this true? If so, this seems a particularly questionable time since four of your seven city council members roster, will not be coming back in 2024.

Responsible property owners, and even their tenants (of which I have been for 30 years downtown), are fully capable of picking up litter and keeping graffiti in check around their properties and storefronts, and even calling law enforcement as needed. It remains a disgrace how unsafe downtown and surrounding districts have too often become in recent years. If in fact crime is in decline, even less reason for you and Mr. Spencer to want to grow Downtown Alliance.

The city budget has exploded in the last 10 years, going from 500 million to near 800 million dollars annually (During your 7.5 years now in office, how many times have you voted to raise our tax levy? How many times has it been raised these 7 years?). This is many hundreds of thousands of dollars of additional city spending - per day. It would seem that if indeed you were focused on upholding law and order, which in fact you have collected vast sums of taxpayer money for, there would be no need for Saint Paul property and business owners to give, willingly or forcibly, millions of additional dollars to a private organization's director who has had a close relationship with you and city hall for years?

Thank you for your time and prompt replies to my questions posed today, and to those from two months ago. They will be shared with others Monday.

Bill Hosko

-----Original Message-----

From: "Bill Hosko" [bill@billhosko.com]

Date: 05/26/2023 10:37 AM

To: mayor@ci.stpaul.mn.us, rebecca.noecker@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Subject: Re: Is the city infringing upon downtown Lund's efforts to protect itself from crime?...

Dear Mayor Carter and Councilmember Noecker,

I emailed you a week ago regarding the city's involvement with downtown Lunds being told to reopen their front doors. You did not reply. Will you please answer my questions below?

As I predicted last week, shoplifting at downtown's Lunds, already high, has steadily grown even higher since the city forced their front doors to be re-opened. Perhaps coincidentally, this AM, there were two police officers inside.

Thank you.

Bill Hosko

-----Original Message-----

From: "Bill Hosko" [bill@billhosko.com]

Date: 05/19/2023 03:12 PM

To: mayor@ci.stpaul.mn.us, rebecca.noecker@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Subject: Is the city infringing upon downtown Lund's efforts to protect itself from crime?...

Dear Mayor Carter and Councilmember Noecker,

Last week, I was surprised to see our downtown Lund's foods front doors being unlocked and opened to the public again. I understand this occurred after an unannounced visit from a city staff person two weeks ago who initially inquired as to why the doors were locked.

Coincidentally, this was at the same time a citizen's letter to the editor had been published highlighting all the instances of crime downtown - including Lund's necessitating the closing of their front doors to deal with it.

Their letter was in response to my just published editorials (Pioneer Press and My Villager) outlining why your legislative request for the right to raise our sales tax rate - to highest in our state status, was misplaced. It was under the auspices we need more money for road repair and for Parks and Recreation's budget even though our city budget has exploded from \$500 million to nearly \$800 million within ten years. In it, I continued, that you should be less focused on funding pet projects and more focused on basic city services - including fighting crime and its now normalization in Saint Paul.

For thirteen months, the public had been using Lund's east-mid-block entrance facing Robert Street after a nighttime arsonist set a recycling bin on fire outside their front doors which subsequently burned up the entire front entry area. Though it caused over 1/2 million dollars in damage, the arsonist was recently given probation after his court hearing. Just another day in Saint Paul - where crime has been normalized.

As we know, Lunds downtown has endured a serious and perpetual shoplifting problem since it opened - nine years ago. The closing of their front entrance after the fire resulted in a large decrease in shoplifting and noticeably fewer instances of disruptive behavior. Though their original hours were 6 AM - midnight - seven days a week (such a luxury for many) during recent years their hours have been steadily reduced. Largely in response to curbing in-store crime, and not just shoplifting crime. Today, they are open 7 AM - 9 PM.

Further, within a year after opening, and also in response to crime, a Saint Paul police officer was hired to be there during evening store hours. Today, an officer is there every day, all day, which I understand costs Lunds \$125 an hour.

The city records you have access to show that Lunds downtown, which leases their space, has over the years dealt with thousands of instances of crime. Again, not all of it limited to shoplifting. They have had to trespass countless people from their store. What an environment they have to deal with. Every day. All day.

You wouldn't want this to be your work environment.

Of course, now with their front door being forcibly opened again, instances of shoplifting are rising again. As word gets out, it will continue rising, and Lunds will have to keep raising their prices onto your constituents even more. It is unimaginable that beautiful downtown Saint Paul would decline so far and in such a short amount of time that it would become normal here that we need a perpetual police presence in our lone remaining grocery store. As you may recall, full-service Rivertown Market, on Wabasha, closed due to rampant theft.

Also nearby on Wabasha, Walgreens often now has a security guard outside its indoor entrance and much of their merchandise is now under lock and key. All, to reduce theft. Our primary skyway convenience store in US Bank Center is perpetually dealing with shoplifters. In one instance last year, an employee was physically assaulted. Also in US Bank Center, on the first floor, a guard has now been installed inside the post office.

On University Avenue, our city's lone Walmart closed due to shoplifting (one of the first urban Walmarts to do so), as then did a nearby CVS Pharmacy and store at Snelling and University (and then another on Maryland and Arcade). Both were adjacent to the light rail line. Though the nearby Target, now has a permanent police presence, they still suffer millions of dollars in annual losses due to shoplifting. I understand it is the worst - Target for crime, in the Twin Cities and in Minnesota.

Downtown Lunds is one block from a light rail station stop as well. The post office and the convenience store I mentioned above are also one block from another one; you've now permanently locked access to the infamous 'skyway stair tower' here next to the Central Station light rail stop because of crime.

1. Can you both please explain why the city felt the need to force our downtown Lunds grocery store to reopen their front doors?
2. Who specifically initiated this?
3. Why couldn't the city simply find a way instead to help or allow Lunds to deal with crime as best they can - in this our now seemingly permanent environment?
4. You have knowledge that there is an abundance of free meals and free food, and other items, available to those in need so why not then ensure there are consequences to shoplifting - which is only growing in seriousness across this city?
5. Surely, the good people of Saint Paul should not be expected to continue paying an ever-higher cost because of it?

Thank you.

Bill Hosko