

CITY OF SAINT PAUL

Deadline for Action: April 11, 2026

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS RESOLUTION

ZONING FILE NUMBER: DSIBZA-000290-2026

DATE: February 17, 2026

WHEREAS, Loucks, Inc., has applied for a variance from the strict application of the provisions of City Council Resolution 23-1442 pertaining to the minimum window and door openings standards. City Council Resolution 23-1442 requires that new commercial buildings facing arterial streets have window and door openings that comprise at least 50 percent of the length and 30 percent of the area of the ground floor along street-facing façades; for the proposed hotel's north façade facing University Avenue, 43.1% of the façade length and 23.3% of the façade area are proposed, for variances of 6.9% and 6.7% respectively, in the T4M zoning district at 1560 University Avenue West PIN: 342923320027; and

WHEREAS, the Saint Paul Board of Zoning Appeals conducted a public hearing on February 17, 2026 pursuant to said application in accordance with the requirements of Section 61.303 of the Legislative Code; and

WHEREAS, four (4) members of the board shall constitute a quorum for the conduct of its business; provided that no action may be taken unless at least four (4) members vote in favor of such action; and

WHEREAS, Chair Daniel Miller, Vice Chair Jerome Benner II, and Board Members, Brian Martinson, and Chris Schweitzer were present, constituting a quorum; and

WHEREAS, six findings must be true to grant a zoning variance request, in accordance with the requirements of Section 61.601 of the Legislative Code:

1. The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the zoning code.

A development project at United Village Block D is requesting two variances from the T-district design standards. City Council Resolution 23-1442 condition's require for new commercial buildings facing arterial streets like University Avenue, windows and doors must comprise at least 50% of the length and 30% of the area of the ground floor facade. The proposed hotel's north facade (facing University Ave.) does not meet these standards as currently designed. The project seeks variances for the following:

1. 43.1% is proposed for the length of openings, for a variance of 6.9%.
2. 23.3% is proposed for the area of openings, for a variance of 6.7%.

The window and door openings standards are intended to create active, visually engaging street frontages that enhance the pedestrian environment. The proposed north façade concentrates window and door openings at public areas such as the entrance, lobby, and retail spaces, while service and operational functions occupy portions of the façade that do not support pedestrian interaction. Though the proposal provides less window and door openings than required, the façade continues to support pedestrian engagement along University Avenue. Given the modest scale of the variances, the proposal remains consistent with the purpose and intent of the zoning code.

The requested variances of 6.9% for length and 6.7% for area are relatively minimal. The applicant has strategically allocated the required window and door openings to the active, public-facing functions of the hotel (entrance, lobby, retail), thereby achieving the functional intent of Sec. 60.103 to create pedestrian engagement and visual interest. Requiring strict numeric standards would compel the applicant to punch unnecessary windows into service areas (housekeeping, mechanical, back-of-house) that offer no pedestrian benefit and may create security risks or privacy issues. Therefore, this specific design, despite the numeric shortfall, remains consistent with the intent of the zoning code of economic viability (a), transit-supportive density (i), flexible design standards (o), and the protection of property function (l). **Therefore, this finding is met for both variance requests.**

2. The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

The St. Paul 2040 Comprehensive Plan establishes transit-oriented development along major corridors such as University Avenue as a core strategy for accommodating growth while advancing equity, sustainability, and neighborhood vitality. The proposed hotel at United Village Block D advances these goals by activating a redevelopment site with a use that generates pedestrian traffic, supports nearby transit investments, and concentrates visual engagement at the public entrance and retail areas. Though the north façade provides 43.1% length of openings (a 6.9% variance) and 23.3% area of openings (a 6.7% variance), it concentrates 100% of its window and door openings at points of actual pedestrian interface like the entrance, lobby, and retail spaces thereby achieving a higher quality of pedestrian engagement. The design is consistent with the 2040 Plan's urban design policies promoting active, pedestrian-friendly street frontages.

The project contributes to the diversification of the corridor's land use mix by introducing lodging, employment, and transit-accessible services. The development therefore advances, rather than undermines, the 2040 Plan's central mandate that equity and opportunity guide all growth decisions. Additionally, concentrating window and door openings only where it serves an active visual purpose reduces thermal heat loss on this north-facing facade, consistent with the Plan's resiliency goals through energy-efficient design.

Requiring strict numeric compliance would necessitate window and door openings in service areas overlooking blank interior walls or equipment rooms, creating a false sense of activity without public benefit while increasing costs and compromising hotel operations. Because the design achieves the substantive goals of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan such as the pedestrian-oriented urban design, transit-supportive density, non-displacement, and energy efficiency, the variances are consistent with both the letter and the equity-centered spirit of the Comprehensive Plan. **This finding is met for both variance requests.**

3. *The applicant has established that there are practical difficulties in complying with the provision, that the property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the provision. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.*

There are practical difficulties for a hotel in complying with the City Council Resolution's standard for ground floor window and door openings along all street facades. The applicant's narrative describes characteristics inherent to all hotels including ground level restrooms, back-of-house operations, and service areas in addition to common public areas including a lobby and amenities. In the operation of a hotel, the main patron spaces are more centrally located around the lobby. The proposed north façade of the hotel provides window and door openings at public areas including the entrance, lobby, amenity and retail spaces, while restrooms, service and operational functions like elevators and stairwells occupy portions of the façade that are impractical for additional window or door openings.

The property will be used in a reasonable manner as a hotel with the proposed façade design. The standards for window and door openings are intended to create active, visually engaging street frontages that enhance the pedestrian environment. To supplement the window and door openings in the public areas of the hotel, the applicant's intent is to include a mural on the ground level wall of the restrooms adjacent to the retail shops where openings are impractical to enhance the pedestrian environment, as shown on the building renderings. **This finding is met for both variance requests.**

4. *The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.*

The development comprises an entire city block, circumstances unique to the property that present challenges designing four active frontages that strictly comply with the ground floor window and door opening requirements. Due to the nature of the hotel uses and their typical layouts, window and door openings are proposed where there are active uses in the building, focused on the lobby area, hotel amenity spaces, and retail store fronts. The hotel floor plan and narrative describe the hotel's layout which includes private and service areas like restrooms, back-of-house space and operations where additional openings in such areas are impractical in design of a hotel with street frontage on all sides. **This finding is met for both variance requests.**

5. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district where the affected land is located.*

The proposed hotel and associated uses and amenities are permitted within the T4M zoning district. The requested variances relate only to design standards and do not authorize any prohibited use. **This finding is met for both variance requests.**

6. *The variance will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*

The project is part of an approved, multi-block redevelopment framework and directly implements the vision for University Avenue as a transit-oriented, pedestrian-supportive

corridor. The surrounding area is characterized by a diverse mix of building types and architectural styles and contemporary mixed-use infill. A hotel facade that meets 43.1% length and 23.3% area window and door openings, with window and door openings strategically concentrated at active uses, fits comfortably within that varied urban fabric. It neither introduces a foreign typology nor establishes a precedent for wholesale waiver of design standards.

Because the project embodies the essential character of the corridor consisting of active, engaging, transit-supportive urban development, the requested variances will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area. **This finding is met for both requested variances.**

WHEREAS, Pang Yang, representing the City of Saint Paul Department of Safety and Inspections, presented a staff recommendation for approval of the requests based upon findings one through six; and

WHEREAS, the Saint Paul Board of Zoning Appeals based upon evidence presented at the public hearing, as substantially reflected in the minutes, reviewed the request; and

WHEREAS, Board Member Chris Schweitzer moved denial of the request based upon finding number three, that the finding has not been met because the practical difficulty presented by the applicant is insufficient.; and

WHEREAS, Board Member Brian Martinson seconded the motion, and a roll call vote was conducted where Board Members Chris Schweitzer, and Chair Daniel Miller voted for the motion and Vice Chair Jerome Benner II voted against the motion; and

WHEREAS, in alignment with Section 61.203(b) of the Legislative Code, the above motion failed; and

WHEREAS, Vice Chair Jerome Benner II's motion to approve the request failed, as it was not seconded; and

WHEREAS, in alignment with Section 61.203(b) of the Legislative Code, the above motion failed; and

WHEREAS, in alignment with MN Statutes Section 15.99 Subd. 2, when a vote on a resolution or properly made motion to approve a request fails for any reason, the failure shall constitute a denial of the request provided that those voting against the motion state on the record the reasons why they oppose the request; and

WHEREAS, Vice Chair Jerome Benner II's motion to approve the request failed, as it was not seconded; and

WHEREAS, board members Chris Schweitzer and Brian Mattinson stated on the record why they opposed the motion to approve; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Saint Paul Board of Zoning Appeals that the request to waive the provisions of City Council Resolution 23-1442 in order to construct a hotel building with a northern ground floor facade containing window and door openings of 43.1 percent of the length and 23.3 percent of the area at 1560 University Avenue West PIN: 342923320027; and legally described as UNITED VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT LOT 1 BLK 2; in accordance with the application for variance and the site plan on file with the Zoning Administrator, **IS HEREBY DENIED**, in alignment with the MN Statutes §15.99 Subd. 2.

MOVED TO DENY BY: Schweitzer

SECONDED BY: Martinson

IN FAVOR: 3

AGAINST: 1

MOVED TO APPROVE BY: Benner II

SECONDED BY: 0

MAILED: 03/04/2026

TIME LIMIT: No decision of the zoning or planning administrator, planning commission, board of zoning appeals or city council approving a site plan, permit, variance, or other zoning approval shall be valid for a period longer than two (2) years, unless a building permit is obtained within such period and the erection or alteration of a building is proceeding under the terms of the decision, or the use is established within such period by actual operation pursuant to the applicable conditions and requirements of the approval, unless the zoning or planning administrator grants an extension not to exceed one (1) year.

APPEAL: Decisions of the Board of Zoning Appeals are final subject to appeal to the City Council within 10 days by anyone affected by the decision. Building permits shall not be issued after an appeal has been filed. If permits have been issued before an appeal has been filed, then the permits are suspended and construction shall cease until the City Council has made a final determination of the appeal.

CERTIFICATION: I, the undersigned Secretary to the Board of Zoning Appeals for the City of Saint Paul, Minnesota, do hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy with the original record in my office; and find the same to be a true and correct copy of said original and of the whole thereof, as based on approved minutes of the Saint Paul Board of Zoning Appeals meeting held on February 17, 2026 and March 2, 2026 on record in the Department of Safety and Inspections, 375 Jackson Street, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

SAINT PAUL BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Maxine Linston

Maxine Linston
Secretary to the Board

