



To: Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development
1400 City Hall Annex
35 West Fourth Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102-1634

From: Union Park District Council 13

Re: SUPPORT for 1566 University Avenue West (United Village hotel)
north façade window and door variances

The Union Park District Council Committee on Land Use and Economic Development met on January 26, 2026 and the Board met on February 4, 2026. The request for 1566 University Avenue West (United Village hotel) window and door variances was discussed with Mike Hahm. The variance request is for the north façade ground level window and door openings:

- o length 43.1% (50% required), and
- o area 23.3% (30% required).

Union Park District Council SUPPORTS the requested variances.

Background related to the United Village hotel:

On 01/22/2024, Mike. Hahm presented plans for the United Village hotel to our Committee on Land Use and Economic Development (CLUED).

On 02/26/2024, Mr. Hahm requested CLUED's support for 7 variances for the hotel, including:

- o an entrance driveway of 322 feet (60 feet maximum permitted);
- o west façade ground level window and door openings of 31% length (50% required) and 16% area (30% required); and
- o west façade above ground level window and door openings of 8% area (15% required).

UPDC opposed the west façade ground level window and door openings variances, but supported the other variance requests.

On 03/15/2024, the Planning Commission approved all of the variance requests except for the entrance driveway.

- o The Planning Commission added conditions to 2 of the variances, including the west façade above ground level window and door openings.
- o The Planning Commission noted UPDC's opposition to the west façade ground level window and door openings variance, but approved this variance (#6) without additional conditions.

On 04/10/2024, the City Council approved the entrance driveway variance and removed the Planning Commission's additional conditions.

(Councilmembers Noecker, Jalali, Bowie, Johnson, and Yang voted yea;
Councilmembers Kim and Jost were absent).

Additional background related to United Village Phase 1 projects:

On 05/15/2024, the City Council approved variance requests for the restaurant pavilions.

(Councilmembers Noecker, Jalali, Bowie, Johnson, Kim, and Jost voted yea;
Councilmember Yang was absent).

During the Councilmembers' discussion, Councilmembers Bowie, Jalali, and Johnson expressed their confidence in and support for United Village's design team. Councilmembers expressed their intention to approve unspecified future variance requests should any arise.

Rationale for Union Park District Council's SUPPORT of the requested north façade window and door openings variances:

1. The findings meet the requirements for the Board of Zoning Appeals to grant a variance.
(See Appendix #1 below.)
2. Denial of this variance would not be consistent with the Planning Commission's 03/15/2024 approval of variance #6 (to permit window and door openings to comprise 31% length (50% required) and 16% area (30% required) on the west façade.)
(See Appendix #2 below.)
3. Denial of this variance would not be consistent with the City Council's 05/15/2024 stated intentions.
(See Appendix #3 below.)

Union Park District Council SUPPORTS the requested north façade window and door variances.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dvorak
Union Park District Council President

Appendix #1 – Variance Findings

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

T 4 District Intent:

The T4 traditional neighborhood district provides for high-density, transit-supportive, pedestrian-friendly mixed-use development.

Masterplan Design Principles:

1. TOD - Pedestrian first (walkable neighborhood)
 - Direct link to Green Line train stations and BRT stops
 - Public open spaces for citizens of the Twin Cities
 - Creation of new mixed use neighborhood
2. Amending the street grid and urban fabric
 - Creation of a new neighborhood district respective to surrounding existing neighborhoods
 - Walkable block dimensions
3. Emphasizing public open spaces
 - Creation of open space network
 - Connecting parks and bike paths
 - Creation of new public open spaces for four season use
4. Mixed-use
 - Mix of 24/7 uses including stadium, office, retail, residential, entertainment, hotel, and open space
 - Active retail street fronts on principal streets
 - Day and night uses
 - Mix of international, regional, and local programs
5. Sustainable stormwater management
 - Green infrastructure such as tree trenches, rain gardens, boulevard swales, and green roofs
 - Sustainable landscape
 - Permeable paving surface
 - Irrigation cistern
 - Grey water recycling station
 - Water feature incorporating stormwater management system.

The proposed hotel is high-density, transit-supportive, and pedestrian-friendly.

The proposed hotel is an active public space on a principal street (University Avenue).

The proposed hotel entrance makes it easy to locate and walk to the Green Line train stations and to bus stops, including the BRT A line stops.

The proposed hotel entrance makes it easy to locate and walk to Bailey Gardens and “The Calling” (the loon sculpture).

The proposed hotel entrance makes it easy to locate and walk to businesses in the Snelling-University area.

The proposed hotel will have activity day and night, and will draw visitors to the Snelling-University area.

The finding that the variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the zoning code is met.

- **The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan.**

Policy LU-9. Promote high-quality urban design that supports pedestrian friendliness and a healthy environment, and enhances the public realm.

The proposed design for the hotel's north façade:

- o has no driveways.
- o makes it intuitively obvious that the ground level is a public (rather than a private) space, and intuitively obvious that people on the exterior are invited to explore the interior.
- o makes it intuitively obvious where to enter, and that pedestrians are welcome to enter, ground level spaces.
- o makes fire escapes (exit-only doors) less obvious on the exterior, reducing visual distraction from the hotel's entrance and reducing the likelihood of confusing an exit-only door with an entrance to the hotel.
- o includes public art, which further supports a pedestrian-friendly streetscape and visual interest.

LU-10. Activate streetscapes with active first-floor uses, street trees, public art, outdoor commercial uses and other uses that contribute to a vibrant street life.

Policy LU-28. Support pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and visual interest through commercial building design.

Union Park District Council's understanding of active streetscapes with active first-floor uses:

Requirements:

- o Intuitively obvious that the ground level is a public (rather than a private) space, and intuitively obvious that people on the exterior are invited to explore the interior.
- o Intuitively obvious where to enter, and that pedestrians are welcome to enter, ground level space(s).

Other considerations:

- o Window shopping (people on the exterior are able to look into the interior)
- o People watching (people on the interior are able to look out to the exterior)

Though window shopping and people watching are often desirable, such as for gift shops and restaurants, in some situations they are neither necessary nor beneficial.

Example: A hotel entrance should provide areas for unloading and loading luggage which are somewhat screened from the interior.

The proposed design for the hotel's north façade:

- o makes it intuitively obvious that the ground level is a public (rather than a private) space, and intuitively obvious that people on the exterior are invited to explore the interior.
- o makes it intuitively obvious where to enter, and that pedestrians are welcome to enter, ground level spaces.
- o provides areas on for unloading and loading luggage which are somewhat screened from the interior.
- o includes public art, which further supports a pedestrian-friendly streetscape and visual interest.

The finding that the variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan is met.

- **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.**
- **The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner. (addressed together)**

The design challenges are the result of locating a hotel entrance along University Avenue. Union Park District Council has, and continues to strongly support the development of a hotel on University Avenue and the placement of its entrance on the University Avenue side. On 04/10/2024, the City Council stated their support for the development of a hotel on University Avenue and the placement of its entrance on the University Avenue side.

Because Ramsey County will not allow curb cuts on University between Simpson and Asbury, the hotel driveway must extend from Simpson to Asbury. The proposed north façade ground level design makes it easy to locate the retail entrances, the hotel entrance, and the optimal areas for hotel guests to unload and load their luggage. The proposed window locations and sizes provide a welcome degree of screening of the unloading and loading process.

The finding that 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, is met.

The finding that the plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner is met.

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

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

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

The finding that the variance will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area is met.

Appendix #2 – Rationale for:

Denial would not be consistent with the Planning Commission's 03/15/2024 approval of variance #6.

(to permit window and door openings to comprise 31% of length (50% required) and 16% of the area (30% required) on the west façade)

Variance #6 was the one variance that Union Park District Council opposed. The west façade's sidewalk-level conveys a separation from the interior rather than an invitation to the interior. It does not convey that the interior is a public space. However, despite noting Union Park District Council's opposition, the Planning Commission approved this variance without additional conditions.

Denial of this request for a variance for the north façade's window and door openings would not be consistent with the Planning Commission's 03/15/2024 determination for the west façade's ground level window and door openings.

Appendix #3 – Rationale for:

Denial would not consistent with the City Council’s 05/15/2024 stated intentions.

After review of the hotel’s design (04/10/2024) and the restaurant pavillion’s design (05/15/2024), City Councilmembers expressed their confidence in and support for United Village’s design team. Councilmembers expressed their intention to approve unspecified future variance requests should any arise.

https://stpaul.granicus.com/player/clip/4837?view_id=37&meta_id=606334&redirect=true
(Councilmember discussion begins at 34:45)

It should be noted that, since the 05/15/2024 City Council meeting, Ward 4 is no longer represented Councilmember Jalali. Ward 4 is now represented by Councilmember Coleman.

It should also be noted that Councilmembers Noecker, Bowie, and Johnson were present for both the 04/10/2024 and the 05/15/2024 City Council meetings, and voted in favor of the variance requests on both dates.

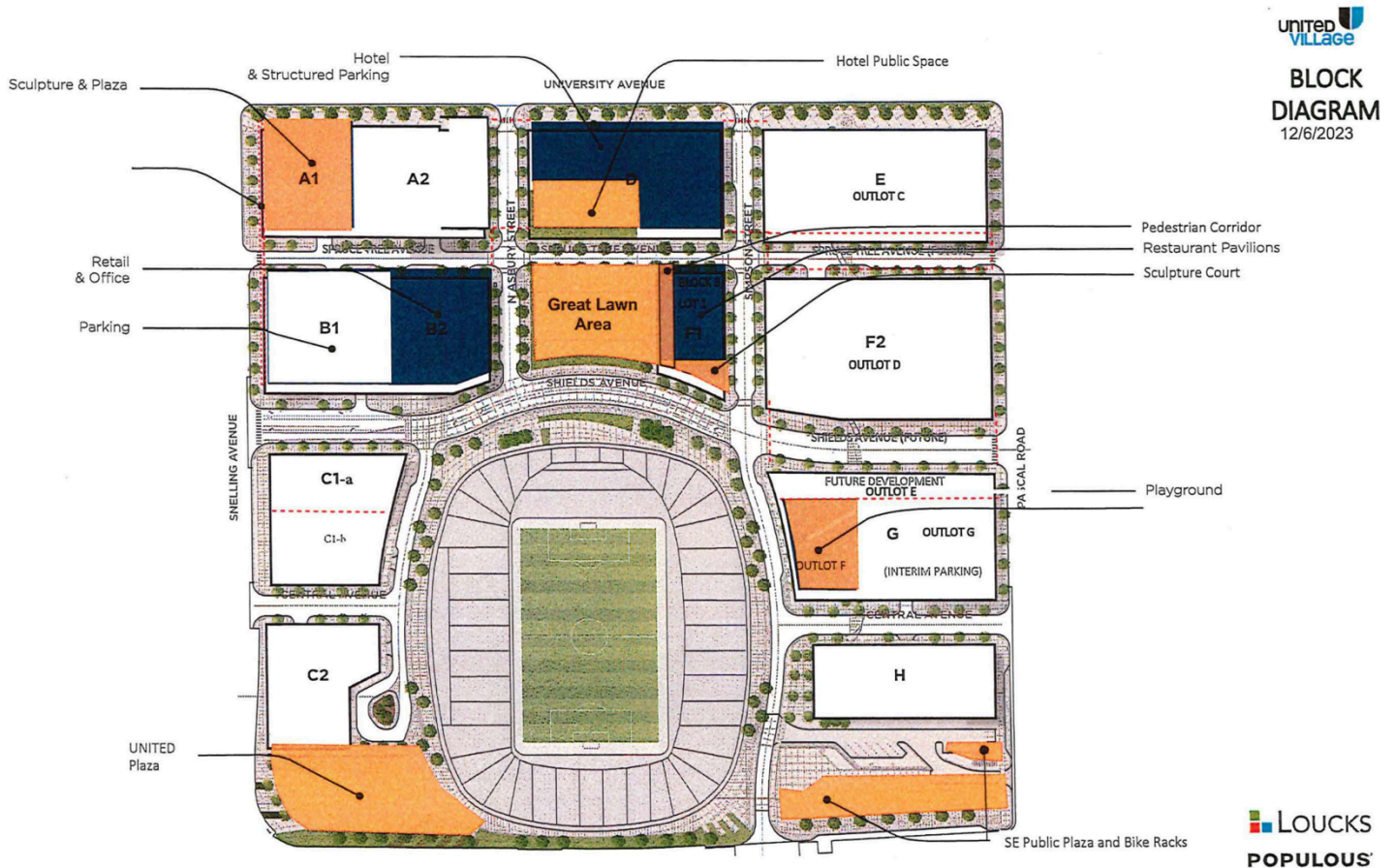
Councilmember Yang was present for the 04/10/2024 City Council meeting and voted in favor of the variances on that date. Councilmember Yang was absent on 05/15/2024.

Councilmembers Kim and Jost were absent for the 04/10/2024 City Council meeting, but were present for the 05/15/2024 City Council meeting and voted in favor of the variances on that date.

No Councilmember spoke against any variance.

No Councilmember abstained or voted against any variance.

Appendix #4 – Block Diagram 12/06/2023





February 10, 2026

Board of Zoning Appeals,

The Midway Chamber of Commerce is appreciative of previous City actions in support of the United Village project, including 24-023058 and 24-023545 in April 2024. We are once again voicing our support for the United Village project, this time for DSIBZA- 000290-2026 regarding the north façade of the proposed hotel.

From a business perspective, the proposal makes more sense to have the hotel lobby positioned in the middle of the building. Based on neighborhood input, the entrance is on the University Avenue side, making this configuration ideal even if there's a need for a variance.

Aesthetically, the variance would also allow for a symmetrical layout and for public art that will not get comprised by doors or windows.

With the support of public interests such as public art and a hotel entrance on the north side, coupled with the most logical entrance to the hotel and the symmetry, the Midway Chamber believes this variance should be granted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chad Kulas".

Chad Kulas
Executive Director