

The 5th Ward Lowdown

Minneapolis City Council Member Blong Yang



Photo: Seven of the Hmong seniors on the water treatment plant tour

Nyob zoo (Hello) Friends and Neighbors,

Summer is coming –Hire a Teen

As we approach the summer months, I wanted to write to urge those of you who own and operate local businesses to consider hiring a neighborhood teenager. There is no big plan or program here, just an appeal from your City Council Member to consider hiring one of the hundreds of teenagers this summer that will be looking for work. A lack of job skills and experience are among the biggest hurdles youth in our community face when they try to gain employment. By giving a teenager a job this summer you can help prepare them for their future and create a stable and safer neighborhood. In Chicago, a study was done last year that showed that employing teenagers over the summer resulted in 43% fewer violent crime arrests. The benefits of summer employment for more teenagers in our community would be enormous.

Water treatment plant

In early March, I took about 40 residents of Minneapolis (and a few from surrounding cities) to tour the water treatment plant (which is actually in Fridley). Many immigrant communities do not trust the water that comes out of the tap. In their home countries and in the refugee camps, our Somali and Hmong neighbors did not trust that tap water was clean or healthy. Many of these folks continue to buy bottled water at grocery stores not just for drinking, but also for cooking and other household uses. That can get to be spendy.

Minneapolis city tap water is some of the best in the country. It's so good many of our neighbors buy it! Golden Valley, Crystal, New Hope, Columbia Heights, Hilltop, Bloomington (which uses a mix of our water and well water), Edina's Morning Side neighborhood and the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport buy water from us.

The people who came with me got to see the amazing technology and science that goes into treating water. They all had a new appreciation for tap water. At the end of the tour, we had a taste test between Minneapolis city water and bottled water. Half of the people didn't taste a difference. The other half tasted a slightly sweeter flavor in the bottled water. When staff told people that they were paying over 200 times more for bottled water than tap water, the difference in taste seemed to not matter anymore. Hopefully we have some new converts to tap water and hopefully we saved a ton of money for these converts. I will be leading more tours to the water treatment plant. Let me know if you want to go.

These are just a couple of things I wanted to highlight and bring to your attention. There is important work to do and all of us can play a part. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Contact the 5th Ward Office
350 South 5th Street, Room 307
Minneapolis, MN 55415
Phone: (612) 673 – 2205

Repealing the Lurking and Spitting Ordinances

On Friday, April 3rd my colleague Council Member Cam Gordon and I introduced the repeal of two city ordinances: lurking and spitting; depositing tobacco.

These two low-level offenses are rarely used. There were no spitting tickets issued last year. As for lurking, there were 56 arrests made in 2014, down from 70 in 2013.

The ordinance around spitting was originally introduced when the biggest public health concern of the time was tuberculosis, so you didn't want people leaving their tuberculosis-laced phlegm on the street. We still don't want people spitting on the street, but I don't think jail time is the appropriate way to deal with being tactless.

My concern with these two ordinances is that they can be used to unfairly target minorities, and I think lurking in particular has been unfairly used.

The lurking ordinance makes it a crime to "lurk...with intent to commit any crime or unlawful act." I think it's very difficult to establish exactly what this is in the first place. It seems to be criminalizing certain types of thought in Minneapolis, not actual crimes. Also, there are some complex constitutional questions presented by the ordinance and its enforcement. The Minnesota Supreme Court in 1968 upheld the constitutionality of an earlier version of the ordinance, but less than a decade later the Washington Supreme Court overturned a similar ordinance, holding that "[t]he potential for arbitrary and discriminatory law enforcement cannot be constitutionally tolerated." The Washington Court's decisions are not binding on Minnesota, but the arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement contemplated by that body is taking place right here in Minneapolis.

According to the Minneapolis Police Department, complaints about lurking originate from white people in the city of Minneapolis about 60% of the time, and black people end up being the suspects about 60% of the time. This isn't to say that the people who are calling in complaints about this are motivated by racism, but simply that this policy has an unequal application. I am very concerned about this and feel that the only way to combat it is to repeal the ordinance.

Some folks argue that repeal of this ordinance will tie the hands of law enforcement officials. However, I believe that every time we could charge someone with lurking, we could probably charge them with a more serious offense. For example, if a bad guy is pacing in an alley around a property, there are laws on the books dealing with trespass, burglary, and possession of tools used in burglary that he could be prosecuted for. Furthermore, if a police officer spots the bad guy and has a reasonable, articulable suspicion that a crime has been, is being or is about to be committed, that police officer can stop that bad guy and question him in what is called an "investigatory stop." Therefore, the hands of law enforcement are not tied simply because they can no longer arrest for lurking. There are other tools that can be used to accomplish a similar result without the potential for arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement of a difficult-to-understand ordinance.

There are a number of community groups that have approached my office and others about these ordinances. I am listening to everyone about this changes, so please feel free to contact my office.

Council Member Cam Gordon and I will be having a townhall meeting on the subject on Wednesday, April 29th from 6:30PM – 8:30PM. Please RSVP to Yer Yang (612) 673-2205.

Public hearings will be held on both of these proposed ordinance repeals on: Wednesday, May 6th at 1:30 PM at City Hall in the City Council chambers.

213.30 Spitting; depositing tobacco.

No person shall spit or expectorate or deposit or place any sputum, spittle, saliva, phlegm, mucus, tobacco juice, cigarette stumps, cigar stumps or quids of tobacco upon the floor, walls or stairway or any part of any public hall or building, depot, market, theater, church or place of public amusement; or upon, into or through any grating, area or stairway; or upon any sidewalk of any public street; or upon the floor, furnishings or equipment of any motor bus while it is in use upon the streets of the city.

385.80 Lurking.

No person, in any public or private place, shall lurk, lie in wait or be concealed with intent to commit any crime or unlawful act.

MN United and a New Stadium in Ward 5

In March Major League Soccer (MLS) selected our existing North American Soccer League team, Minnesota United FC, as the 23rd MLS franchise. I'm not mentioning this just because I love soccer, but because MN United is looking at a potential site for their stadium in Ward 5. They have rights to develop on a parcel between the Farmers Market and the HERC (the garbage burner).

Any discussion about stadiums instantly revolves around public subsidies for construction and development. I want to make it explicitly clear: I do not support public financing for constructing stadiums for professional sports teams. That being said, I think a professional soccer team would be a huge benefit for the City of Minneapolis and the region as a whole. The vision that MN United have for the stadium and the area around it is powerful. With transit investments and the amenities of downtown, MN United's development in and around the stadium will greatly impact the Royalston area, which is the part of North Loop in Ward 5. They want to make the Farmers Market a better resource and amenity for everyone, and they want to make sure that the stadium has an active presence, including shops, green space, and restaurants year round. It's really a vision for an urban stadium, the likes of which we don't have in Minneapolis right now. I hope to be able to take the #5 bus to pick up some fresh fruits and vegetables from the Farmers Market, take the Blue Line to City Hall, take the Green Line to the Royalston Station to catch a game at the new stadium, and then take the 5 back home.

Target Center Renovations

I don't support using public money to build new stadiums, but earlier this month I voted for the city to approve \$129 million on a rehab of the Target Center. The city's contribution is \$74 million. \$49.5 million was the city's original commitment. This vote was to increase the amount by another \$24.5 million. This increase was to mitigate significant construction cost escalation risk and to allow for a more complete and satisfactory renovation now. Essentially, this vote was to fix everything now instead of fixing things incrementally later at possibly a higher cost.

It wasn't a vote I was very happy about taking—one of the hardest parts of being an elected official is dealing with what you have, not what you want—but it was one that I took because I felt it was necessary. The city has owned the Target Center since the mid-90's. The building is one of the busiest arenas in the world and it brings thousands upon thousands of people to Minneapolis every year. Like a house you own that you have to keep up, I feel like we have to maintain the Target Center. Unlike a football stadium, which is really only used 8-10 times a year, the Target Center can be used to its capacity almost every day of the year, bringing visitors to downtown Minneapolis from near and far. The Target Center is a draw for the City of Minneapolis, hosting concerts, basketball games, corporate events, sporting events, and other events. We need to make sure it stays that way.

Trees, Trees, Trees!

Reserve today for a tree for Arbor Day

"Urban Forest 2015" will be hosting a tree planting event for Arbor Day, with 60 trees available. Their focus is precisely to plant in the areas affected by the 2011 tornado. Trees will go to Northside residents and businesses at no cost. All the trees will be from [Freedom Tree Farms](#). Choose from several varieties and sizes of trees, including fruit trees: Honey Crisp Apple, McIntosh Apple, Tophat Blueberry, River Birch, Contender Peach, Kieffer Pear, Moonglow Pear, and Profusion Crabapple. Limit one tree per household. We are also looking for volunteers to help plant the trees. Please contact our office if you would like to sign-up for a tree or volunteer by contacting Yer Yang at (612) 673 -2205 or yer.yang@minneapolismn.gov.

Order a tree for \$25

Tree Trust is offering more than 1,200 three- to eight-foot trees for only \$25 each. Hurry before they are gone. You must pick the trees up on May 16, 17, 18 or 19 at the Minneapolis Impound Lot. Trees are available for Minneapolis property owners including residents, businesses and nonprofits. Choose from several varieties and sizes of trees, including fruit trees. Order your tree online at www.treetrust.org or call 952-767-3886.



Vacant Properties Owned by the City

One of my biggest priorities is doing something about the staggering amount of empty lots and vacant homes on the Northside. The city of Minneapolis owns over 200 empty lots on the Northside, which it spends over \$3,600 a year just cutting the grass and shoveling snow (that's to say nothing of the money that can be spent on cleaning up trash or tearing down a home). The city has spent over \$3 million dollars simply to mow the lawns on the parcels it owns on the Northside. (\$3 million was the sum of \$3,600 times the number of months each lot was vacant and occupied by the city.)

In addition to the vacant lots the city owns, it also owns about 31 vacant and boarded up homes. (There are over 550 properties in Minneapolis on the vacant building and registration (VBR) list.) You've probably seen a few of these on your block or in your neighborhood. These empty houses and lots are weights, keeping down our neighborhoods. I am working closely with Council President Barb Johnson, the Mayor's office, and city staff to come up with an aggressive plan to sell city-owned houses to rehabbers and local residents. In March we passed a staff direction to start looking at the empty lots we own to identify which ones should be marketed and which ones should be used for community gardens or other purposes. These empty lots and vacant homes are assets, although they may not always be seen like that, and we need to do what we can to make these assets work for our city and our community.

West Broadway Education and Career Center Construction Starts

The State of Minnesota will be moving into a new North Minneapolis Work Force Center in 2016. When it arrives at its new, larger home at 800 West Broadway Ave., it will become one tenant in the West Broadway Education and Career Center. That's because the extra space in this facility makes it possible to partner with education and health care organizations to offer new training opportunities. Other tenants will include Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis Community & Technical College, and NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center. Retail space will also be filled on the West Broadway side.

More information is at www.minneapolismn.gov/cped/wbecc.



800 West Broadway currently sits vacant and construction will begin this summer.

Watch Your Mailbox for 2016 Property Value Notice

The City of Minneapolis is mailing 2016 property value notices to all property owners in Minneapolis. On the first page of the property value notice there is a section titled "Appealing the Value or Classification of Your Property." On this page, folks will find the phone number of the appraiser who's assigned to their property and who they should contact if they have questions about their assessed value. If you disagree with the estimated value for your home, take the following steps:

- First, call the Assessor's Office to discuss your concerns with a deputy assessor responsible for valuing your property. The deputy assessor can explain how the property value and classification were determined.
- Then, if needed, appeal to the City Board of Appeal and Equalization: www.minneapolismn.gov/boe

For more information visit the City Assessor's website at www.minneapolismn.gov/assessor.