

As printed in the *Villager*, February 1-14, 2017 edition, the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*, February 2-8, 2017 edition, and the *Park Bugle*, February 2017 edition

To build the public trust, make St. Paul Gov't more citizen-friendly (*Villager*), St. Paul Boards and Commissions appointment process still messy and murky (*Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*), St. Paul appointment process messy and murky (*Park Bugle*)

Who are we? What are we doing here? Where are we going? Existential questions that do not begin with us, but likely go back to our very origins as human beings and may very well be pondered by our descendants through time eternal. Anyone paying attention to our world today feels these acutely as we reflect on trends, elections, and their outcomes.

Saint Paul STRONG (SPS), while perhaps not framing the issue in those terms, has been working with the City of St. Paul with those questions in mind. Such work is evident and relevant in the citizen appointments, or lack-thereof, to the City's many boards and commissions.

Citizen participation and the perspective each individual brings is the very reason these formats were created. The Mayor, the City Council, and SPS all agree the process for citizen appointment to, and service on, the City's boards and commissions needs to be improved. Looking at the City's website it's hard to know what commissions have meetings and when, who's on the commissions, whether there are vacancies, what a member's responsibilities are, what's on the agenda, and so forth.

Since February, 2016, SPS has been meeting with, and bringing suggestions to, Council Members and the Mayor's staff. Almost all of SPS's ideas about openness, trust, responsibility, transparency, and accountability have been favorably received. Suggested improvements include:

- (1) An easy-to-use calendar posting when commissions meet and what's on the agenda;
- (2) Biographies of current commission members, what part of town they're from, how much diversity they represent, and how long they've served;
- (3) Contact information so their fellow citizens can contact them, and in that way, more voices are heard at the table;

(4) Minutes showing attendance, quorums, and votes taken;

(5) Enforcement of city policy to alternate morning and evening meetings for better attendance and equitable availability;

(6) Clarity on recruitment and application process to become a member, whether there are term limits, number of vacancies, and a way to acknowledge receipt of an application to serve, together with the next steps in the process.

Appointments to these commissions need to reflect the makeup of our community if we hope to achieve equity in our fair city. Consider this: census data is collected every ten years. Some commission appointments are for three years, with a three-term limit, but up until recently, the term limits were not honored. Many folks were sitting in these seats for a decade or more. If our appointments today don't reflect census data now, we are going to be even farther behind in reaching equity goals if these seats don't open up until after the next census is taken ten years from now. That is a trend we do not want to be setting.

After a year of meetings with city staff and elected officials (and making suggestions), there has been so little progress, it's time to take our campaign to the public. Please join us in our effort to make these needed changes happen. Call or write your Council Member and the Mayor's Office. Find us, or join with us:

<http://www.saintpaulstrong.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/saintpaulstrong/>