

From: Rand Sola [mailto:randmade@yahoo.com]

Sent: Friday, September 25, 2015 4:18 PM

To: Council

Cc: Kristi Stokes; Don Garofalo; Matthew Marturano; Eric Faust; Rick Heimbach (rlhheimbach@aol.com); Douglas Melander; Rand Sola; Steven Sola; Steve LaFlamme

Subject: Parking on Superior Street and Stable Retail

Dear City Councilors,

My name is Rand Sola and as it pertains to this issue I own the Fannie Rose Building at 101-107 East Superior Street, I also own and operate the 94 year old Original Coney Island restaurant located in that building. Very briefly, the Fannie Rose Building is a recent restoration on East Superior Street where between 2008 and 2012 my partners and I invested over 3.5 million private dollars to create a first class retail, office and apartment building. A formerly run down 80 % vacant 50% condemned building is now contributing to the viability of East Superior Street through new apartments, new office spaces and four retail businesses – Our efforts received a commendation from the Duluth Preservation Society and the building is now 100% occupied. I'm also a life long Duluth resident, never living more than 3 miles from Superior Street.

The Council will be looking at parking options on Superior Street at next week's meeting and I thought that with a fair amount of skin in the game it was reasonable for me to take a few minutes of your time and offer my perspective with a thought or two on the subject, I ASSURE you, I have more.

As a teenager attending Washington Jr. High School in the early 80's, my friends and I would walk down the hill after school and spend a considerable portion of our allowances and paper route money at a store called "Double Discount." "Double D" was an oddly named but exceptional fishing, camping and rock climbing store located about where Visit Duluth and the LHB offices are now. Directly across the street was "Scandinavian Designs", my go to place for gifts for my parents and grandparents, in fact the entire Minnesota Power Building had retail spaces on Superior Street. These stores were a perfect fit for Duluth's heritage and outdoor culture and would continue to be a perfect fit today...

If you open an old city directory from this time, you may be astounded at all the retail stores and restaurants located up and down our main street. MORE astonishing, and closer to the point I'd like to make, is how FEW of those businesses are still here today. If you examine that directory or scratch your memory you will be hard pressed to find much more than a dozen of those retailers still in operation today. More specifically, you can look at every block from 5th Ave West to 5th Ave East and not find a single upper or lower block where more than ONE business remains from 30 years ago. Many of these blocks actually now contain ZERO businesses from just 3 decades back! There is ONE exception to this and that is exactly the point I would like to make.

The upper block of 300 west contains SEVEN long standing, iconic Duluth businesses:

Columbia Clothing
Security Jewelers
Duluth Camera Exchange
The Frame Corner
Peterson Anderson Florists
Bagley and Company

India Palace (This has changed names/owners but has always been a successful restaurant)

For anyone not familiar, the retailers on this block lobbied in the 11th hour of the last Superior Street renovation to have angled parking spaces from one end of their block to the other. They managed to find a sympathetic mayor at the time who helped secure the entire block of angled parking you still see there today. Each of the other blocks on Superior Street got nothing of the sort and would have on-street parking cut in half. Three decades later seven businesses remain here and had a quarter of the block not burned to the ground in 90's the number would likely be even HIGHER. Keep these numbers in mind, out of 20 blocks (10 upper and 10 lower) 19 were unable to support more than a single long term retailer, ONE was able to support SEVEN, they must have been on to something??

I make this case for angled parking and the design sacrifices it may entail because a worthwhile downtown doesn't just need retail, it needs STABLE retail, and stable retail attracts better retail (i.e. Starbucks.) The upper 300 West block is an excellent example where ample angled parking facilitated stable retail in a downtown that was DECIMATED otherwise. What better example can we look to for comparing Superior Street to than Superior Street?

Needless to say, I don't shop at "Double Discount" anymore, parking in front of that business was eliminated and they closed soon after, as did "Scandinavian Designs" and ALL the Minnesota Power shops. I now spend my paper route money out at Marine General where I park in an angled space next to the building. My partners and I made the significant investment in the Fannie Rose Building with a vision to attract stable tenants, we need the new Superior Street to do support the same. I ask that you support on-street parking and encourage the engineers to create as many possible angled spaces as possible.

Thank you for your time.

Rand Sola
Owner
Fannie Rose, LLC
South Pier Inn, LLC
Sola Properties, LLC
South Pier Shores, LLC

Original Coney Island, Inc.
South Pier Lighthouse Company, LLC
Duluth Evening Herald Paper Boy (retired)