

Public Safety

The St. Paul Area Chamber advocates for a measurable year-over-year improvement in both crime statistics and the public perceptions of safety in the East Metro. The economic vitality of our region depends on the assurance of public safety in our communities. City, county, and state level public officials must prioritize resources to ensure the effectiveness of the East Metro law enforcement and criminal justice systems, and to increase public confidence in the safety of our communities while promoting better public safety outcomes. SPAC supports policies that improve public safety, including:

- A renewed focus on improving public safety perceptions and crime prevention by increasing police presence in central corridors. The City of St. Paul and Ramsey County should prioritize resources towards filling all positions requested by the Chief of Police and County Sheriff.
- Conducting at least two police academies each year, to better recruit and train a new pipeline of officers.
- Enforce current rules and develop new strategies to improve the safety, cleanliness and vitality of the downtown skyway system.
- Utilizing targeted co-responder and mental health crisis programs for mental health and/or substance use issues to be used to supplement police, providing law enforcement the bandwidth to dedicate their time and resources to core policing functions.
- Investing in the technological tools law enforcement needs to properly deter criminal activity and solve crimes (i.e., cameras, communications, gunshot detection technology).
- Collaborations between employers and public safety professionals to reduce workplace violence.
- Improving the safety perceptions of transit through physical improvements at stations and bus stops, increased security presence and law enforcement responsiveness, and enforcing an acceptable standard of behavior on transit vehicles.

Housing

We support commonsense policies that increase the overall housing stock throughout the East Metro (rental/homeownership, multi/single-family, affordable/workforce/market rate). We believe that there is no singular solution to the housing shortage in our region and that government partners should focus on attracting private housing development, encouraging cross-sector partnerships and reimagining housing policy to reduce cost barriers for developers and consumers. We support:

- Creating a state tax credit to incentivize the conversion of underutilized commercial properties, along with City economic support for these projects, as recommended by the Downtown Investment Strategy. These incentives will help increase housing stock as well as address devaluations and impending property tax shifts.
- Zoning modifications to ensure that current regulations are solutions to identified problems and do not inhibit other housing production or affordability goals, or unnecessarily increase development or operational costs.
- Policies and investments that strengthen the regional homelessness response system and promote collaboration among local and state governments, to ensure that adequate shelter is accessible, and no one is forced to sleep on the streets of St. Paul.
- Recognizing the intersectionality of access to mental health care, addiction treatment, and unsheltered homelessness and providing a holistic response to assist those in crisis.
- St. Paul's rent stabilization ordinance has created unnecessary risk for investors and inhibited development of new housing stock within the City. The policy has also had a negative impact on valuations of multi-unit housing properties, which will shift property tax burdens onto other

residential properties. While we support the repeal of this ordinance, at minimum, it should be amended to provide a 30-year new construction exemption.

Business Climate and Competitiveness

The best contributor to a strong economy is a healthy business climate. We will promote public policy that supports the rights of private employers to make decisions based on what is important to their employees and customers. We also strongly encourage our public sector partners to engage the business community in their planning and decision-making processes. We support:

- “Soft touch” regulations, efficient and predictable permitting and licensing processes, and reduced barriers to entry for new businesses.
- Focus on funding for core government services in response to downtown commercial vacancies and declining real estate valuations impact the City of St. Paul’s property tax levy.
- Key economic development projects to improve the vibrancy and livability in downtown St. Paul, such as the Xcel Energy Center renovation, RiversEdge, and Central Station redevelopment.
- Land use policies which provide for a diversified tax base, preservation of industrial land, and transit-oriented development.
- Access to opportunities for BIPOC- and women-owned businesses.
- A statewide approach to early-childhood education and childcare funding, recognizing that the task of preparing the future generation of workers is larger than any individual city can fund through the property tax or administer successfully on its own. To that end, we do not support the 2024 ballot initiative to increase the property tax levy for a city-run childcare subsidy program, as the anticipated revenues fall well below projected expenses- creating an unfunded mandate.

Infrastructure

High quality community development and reliable infrastructure are central to economic growth.

Investment in infrastructure (including roads, bridges, ports, transit, utilities, and telecommunications) are central to the economic growth of the East Metro region. We support:

- Reprioritizing investments in public infrastructure (streets, bridges, park facilities) in the city budget, recognizing that these are core municipal services.
- Transportation design and transit service that supports efficient workforce access to employers, as well as improved mobility throughout the region.
- Recognizing that the condition of a streetscape reflects its perceived value to the community, adequate budget resources must be allocated to ongoing maintenance of live vegetation in traffic corridors, as well as graffiti and trash removal in public spaces. Specifically, improving the walkability of downtown St. Paul as outlined in the Downtown Investment Strategy.

Talent Supply and Development

Access to a diverse, skilled workforce is an essential tool for business growth. We support public policies that prioritize efforts to help employers attract and retain employees, while also allowing employers the flexibility to meet the needs of their companies and employees. This includes:

- Resources and connections for students and workers looking for new career opportunities.
- Immigration policies to support the attraction of professionals to our market.
- Addressing the benefits cliff by ensuring public assistance policies are not an inhibitor to career development and workforce retention.
- Collaborating with the local network of public and private higher education institutions to prepare the workforce of the future.
- Targeted talent development in high-demand and high-growth fields, including the medical/caring professions, technology, education, manufacturing, and the trades.