



from the Mayor's Desk...

Dear Citizens and Business Owners of Maplewood, Greetings! As many of you know, during this past legislative session, Minnesota reviewed its eminent domain law. I am proud to say that I was in attendance with key legislative leaders and others as the final bill, designated as Chapter 214, was signed by the Governor on May 19, 2006 on the steps of the Capital. This bill limits the power of condemning authorities to take property for "economic development" purposes while leaving the use of eminent domain for more traditional public purposes unchanged.

But what you don't know is, had it not been for end-of-session scheduling constraints, the Governor's office was making arrangements for the Governor to come to Maplewood to sign this bipartisan bill in the parking lot of the Moose Lodge located in the heart of our very own Gladstone neighborhood!

In my individual capacity I lobbied for eminent domain reforms by testifying before the MN House of Representatives Public Safety, Policy, and Finance committee and the MN Senate State and Local Government Operations committee as well as appearing on the television program, Almanac.

During my testimony, I focused on the need to get back to basics and develop a common sense definition of blight that is measurable and objective, based on building safety. It's an open secret that in first ring suburbs, like Maplewood, redevelopers hover and circle – shopping for City Administrators and City Councils who are vulnerable to a jazzed up sales pitch of instant prosperity – ready to find "blight" or to create the "image of blight" by pointing to "tired" areas that simply need sprucing up. Unfortunately, this scenario dispro-

portionately impacts and affects our towns' senior citizens, our towns' small business communities, and our towns' affordable housing stock. To be sure, I'm not saying that redevelopment is bad. Far from it! However, we need safeguards to ensure that "blight" is measured by an objective standard that creates a level playing field and not simply measured by the "in the eye of the beholder" standard.

Minnesota's reformed eminent domain law now restricts what constitutes a "blighted area", a determination which was previously left to the discretion of the condemning authority and the courts. Today, a "blighted area" is defined as an area that is zoned and used for urban use and where more than 50 percent of the buildings are structurally substandard. The reforms further define "structurally substandard" as a building where:

- 1) it has been inspected and cited for enforceable housing, maintenance or building code violations;
- 2) the cited violations have not been remedied after two notices to cure noncompliance; and
- 3) the cost to cure the violations is more than 50 percent of the assessor's taxable market value for the building; or a building that is unsafe or lacking in basic equipment.

If you would like to know more about the eminent domain reforms enacted, there is a good summary piece found at the following web address:

http://www.briggs.com/CM/AboutBriggs/ALERT%20-%20EMINENT_DOMAIN_INSERT--MAY_29__2006.pdf

Watch for other great things to come! As always, I welcome your comments and invite one and all to attend the monthly Mayor's Forum held the first Saturday at Maplewood City Hall in the Maplewood Room from 10:00 am to noon.