



Dear Planning Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We appreciate the work that has been done to study the existing definition of family in the Saint Paul Zoning Code and its impacts, and to prepare three optional definitions to replace the existing language. We are glad that the City of Saint Paul is preparing to make this change; it is long overdue.

We recommend that the City of Saint Paul adopt both Option 1 and Option 3: “Six (6) or fewer adults, together with minor children in their care, living as a single housekeeping unit; OR any number of adults who are all related to each other by blood, marriage, guardianship, or domestic partnership as defined by Chapter 186 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code and up to four (4) additional adults, together with minor children in their care, living as a single housekeeping unit.”

Of the given options, Option 3 provides the most flexibility for households with different cultural norms for sharing shelter, for unrelated persons who like the economic and social benefits of shared living arrangements, and for multigenerational households whose members may not all be officially related according to the definitions in Chapter 186 of our Legislative Code. All of these households deserve to be legally recognized as cohabitants or “families” in our city. Furthermore, Option 3 best supports housing affordability in our city, by enabling more adults to share their housing costs.

The only shortcoming of Option 3 is that it would not change the current limit of four unrelated adults who can live together. Adopting Option 1 alongside Option 3 would raise this limit from four unrelated adults to six. It is increasingly common in St. Paul and across the country for unrelated adults to live together and our zoning code should recognize this change.

We believe that the best way to redefine “family” in our Zoning Code is to set the definition as broadly as possible by adopting both options 1 and 3 to support the widest range of living arrangements for the familial, social, and economic needs of Saint Paul’s residents. The Zoning Code’s definition of family was never intended to regulate minimum acceptable standards for residential buildings, or to prevent hazardous living situations; rather, there are other sections of city codes and state building code that accomplish this. We trust that those regulations will continue to ensure safe living conditions in Saint Paul.

Thank you for considering these comments and for your more holistic view of households.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Wefel,  
Sustain Saint Paul, Co-Chair  
444 Warwick Street, Saint Paul, 55105