

Stores open, but protected



SCOTT TAKUSHI / PIONEER PRESS

Workers board up windows at the Bank of America building at University Avenue and Fry Street in St. Paul on Monday after at least seven St. Paul storefronts were damaged late Sunday or early Monday by vandalism after the fatal police shooting of Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center.

Businesses in St. Paul's Midway hope for the best while preparing for potential unrest

By Frederick Melo
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St. Paul's University Avenue business district is open to customers even as it boards itself up — just in case.

Last week, workers with Bruno Professional Glass encased the doors and store windows of the AutoZone on Lexington Parkway in a full wrap of protective plywood. Down University Avenue in either direction, business

storefronts such as the new Bank of America financial building on Fry Street, Goodwill, Sun Foods, Popeye's Chicken and Cricket Wireless stood fortress-ready for potential vandalism, while sporting the occasional hand-lettered sign indicating they were still taking walk-in customers.

"I haven't heard of any business saying they're closing down during this time, other than during the curfew or out of respect for the Wright family," said Chad

Kulas, executive director of the Midway Chamber of Commerce. "Otherwise, I've heard businesses refer to the plywood as a 'cheap insurance policy.' They just want to protect their employees and their businesses."

Prosecutors and defense attorneys rested their case Thursday in the murder trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, accused in the death of George Floyd last May. During the trial, nightly protests over the

fatal police shooting of 20-year-old Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center last Sunday have resulted in dozens of arrests.

Both cases have thrown a pall over the Twin Cities, reopening emotional wounds laid bare a year ago when Floyd's final tortured moments under Chauvin's knee were captured on cellphone camera and broadcast to the world.

MIDWAY BUSINESSES, 8A

CONTINUED FROM 1A

> Midway businesses

FINANCIAL LOSSES FROM UNREST LAST SUMMER

For some small businesses, the pain has been compounded by financial losses suffered during widespread arson, looting and rioting that caused upwards of \$700 million in statewide damage last May, on top of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Many business owners fear a similar level of unrest could be just around the corner, even as some have only just begun to reopen or relocated to new areas.

At least seven St. Paul storefronts were damaged last Sunday night or in the early-morning hours Monday, including two doors and four windows at the Sharrett's Liquor Store at Raymond and University avenues.

"They didn't get anything on the inside, but still. That's tons of money, even with insurance," said longtime co-owner Jim Forsland, who has appreciated supportive visits from his regular customers. "They're now boarding us up, and I have to stay that way for a while, but people will have to realize we're open. ... It's been fairly steady."

POLICE, BUSINESSES PREP

In St. Paul, Monday night proved less eventful, likely as a result of a 7 p.m. curfew imposed by Gov. Tim Walz in Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

Another curfew began at 10 p.m. Tuesday in St. Paul, Minneapolis and other select cities.

Still, the tension isn't likely to abate soon. In Hennepin County, three other former Minneapolis police officers will be tried together, in a separate trial related to Floyd's death, beginning Aug. 23.

Officials with St. Paul's Department of Safety and Inspections and St. Paul Planning and Economic Development have pointed residents and business owners to a city website dedicated to trial preparations — tinyurl.com/2ey6nvm9. The St. Paul Police Department Crime Prevention Unit is offering business owners a free security survey, and issuing emergency updates by email and text message.

SAFETY COALITIONS

To prepare for potential unrest, the



PHOTOS BY SCOTT TAKUSHI / PIONEER PRESS

Windows are boarded up as customers enter Sun Foods on University Avenue in St. Paul on Wednesday. Many businesses in the Midway area have put up plywood for protection from potential vandalism should unrest occur as the Derek Chauvin trial reaches its end and protests continue over the fatal police shooting of Daunte Wright.

St. Paul Police Department has convened a coalition of east-metro public safety agencies, including the St. Paul Fire Department, St. Paul Emergency Management, the Ramsey County sheriff's office, the Washington County and Dakota County sheriff's offices and the Minnesota State Patrol.

They're also in touch with the Minnesota National Guard, which currently has a visible presence in Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center and likely will become more visible in St. Paul in the days ahead.

In the west metro, another coalition of law enforcement partners operates under the title "Operation Safety Net," which posts security updates to Twitter at twitter.com/MinnesotaOSN.

That coalition has come under criticism for the armed response to late-night protests outside police headquarters in Brooklyn Center.

Journalists on Tuesday night complained of being ordered to clear the area despite being neutral observers with special exemption from curfews, and a videographer for the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported he needed surgery for a broken ring finger after being shot by a non-lethal projectile. He will be unable to operate a camera for weeks.

Some critics have called the police and National Guard response in Brooklyn Center a heavy-handed



Two doors and four windows at Sharrett's Liquor Store at Raymond and University avenues were damaged by vandalism late Sunday or early Monday.

overcorrection in response to concerns that public safety teams were slow to respond to widespread vandalism, looting and arson last May, including the destruction of the Lake Street police station in Minneapolis.

"No more curfews," said St. Paul City Council member Mitra Jalali on Wednesday. "Call off Operation Safety Net. The police and National Guard are not the answer. What's happening to our community in the name of law, order, and even our own pain — the most galling stated justification of all — is

unacceptable."

DISASTER PREP, RECOVERY RESOURCES

In St. Paul, business advocates are trying to get the word out about disaster preparation and recovery resources. The East Side Area Business Association maintains emergency planning information for its member area at StPaulprepared.com.

In the Midway, the St. Paul-based MaKee Co., a construction manage-

ment and consulting firm, has been working on business preparation and damage response plans with the Midway Chamber, the Associated General Contractors of America and Keith Baker, managing director of Reconnect Rondo and president of the St. Paul-based Consortium Minnesota consulting company.

The coalition's strategy — dubbed CCC, or "Construction Connection to Community" — includes helping store owners understand the finer nuances of their insurance policies, locating plywood supplies and disseminating preparedness checklists in English, Hmong, Spanish, Somali and Vietnamese. They've connected business owners to four construction contractors of color, who are in turn being mentored by five larger construction companies such as J.E. Dunn and McGough Construction.

"Some folks are dealing with landlords," said R. Lynn Pingol, chief executive officer of the MaKee Co., which is based at University Avenue and Park Street. "Others are dealing with not understanding what their coverage really means. The beautiful thing is after all of this stuff happens, the BIPOC general contractors and subcontractors can take that same model and keep it going. We're developing a solid infrastructure for equity on both sides of the fence. We want to do some economic healing, and really push the community forward."

Business owners can sign up to request services or more information online at makeecompany.com/ccc-initiative. The coalition is seeking donations of money, plywood and other supplies, as well as volunteer labor.

Pingol, who participated in disaster relief efforts after police-community clashes in Greece in 2008 and 2010, is also working with the city of Brooklyn Center on damage assessments related to store looting and vandalism.

On April 27, the League of Women Voters St. Paul will host a virtual community discussion about "Rebuilding University Avenue" with Kulas, the director of the Midway Chamber of Commerce; Nicolle Goodman, director of St. Paul Planning and Economic Development; and a business owner who is yet to be announced.

The event will take place from 7 to 8 p.m. via Zoom at tinyurl.com/RebuildUni2021.

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