

136 Western Ave N #107
Saint Paul, MN
55102

May 24th, 2022

To the Saint Paul City Council,

I want to reiterate my continued statements that I believe community engagement needs to be more robust surrounding development of all kinds in Saint Paul. Massive developments like the Hillcrest Site should have engagement numbers in the thousands, and not the three hundred or so folks who were engaged around Hillcrest. In particular, I am concerned about sincere and robust engagement with our lower income and BIPOC community members.

Most of the time, I'm unaware that development is happening until ground is broken, and I'm being paid to pay attention to development on the East Side. It's extremely difficult for the average person to be engaged around development unless they're on a district council. If that is going to be the case, then district councils need significantly more funding to overcome their problematic history of boards made up primarily of white homeowners.

I'm encouraged by the Port Authority's working groups, but I also believe that if community engagement is to be taken seriously then community input should show up in a proposed plan.

When I review the community priorities, versus the proposed master plan, what I see is a joint partnership between multiple government agencies bowing to corporations in exchange for an increased tax base. I understand the need for more taxes, but it shouldn't come in exchange for selling out rank and file East Siders for corporate interests.

I support the plan's housing goals, but I also believe that with Ramsey County's 10,000 plus unit shortage of 30% AMI housing, roughly 100 units of 30% is a drop in the bucket. If we're serious about fighting poverty, then we need to do far better when large opportunity sites like this one come up.

I'm encouraged by the Port Authority's sustainability goals. All developments large and small should be modeled after what the Port is trying to achieve. Their efforts are a step in the right direction, and the plans for bicycle infrastructure on the site are also encouraging.

Since the overwhelming majority of the site is going to be turned into light industrial, my final comment would be that the industrial players must hire East Siders. I know that is difficult to enforce, especially considering privacy concerns, but when you're giving away our land to big business, then you should be able to require those businesses to build wealth in our community through local hiring. Don't incentivize the businesses, mandate it. The government works for the people, and needs to keep that in mind when attracting business interests.

Best regards,
Ben Werner
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