

**CITY OF SAINT PAUL**

Christopher B. Coleman, Mayor

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**DATE:** March 28, 2012

**TO:** Mayor Chris Coleman  
Members of the Saint Paul City Council

**FROM:** Barb Wencil, Chair, Saint Paul Planning Commission

**SUBJECT:** *Greater Lowertown Master Plan Summary*

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**BACKGROUND**

The existing *Historic Lowertown Plan* was adopted in 1994. With all that has been happening in Lowertown since the early 2000s, there has long been interest in updating the 1994 Plan. The first request came in 2007, with a letter from CapitolRiver Council (District 17) asking the Planning Commission to initiate preparation of a new Lowertown Small Area Plan. The Planning Commission declined the request, suggesting that, because there were several activities underway in Lowertown at the time (alignment and station location decisions related to Central Corridor LRT, anticipated adoption of the *Central Corridor Development Strategy* and purchase of Union Depot by Ramsey County), it would be better to wait and address Lowertown issues in the anticipated Union Depot Station Area Plan (subsequently titled the *Downtown Station Area Plan*). The station area planning process was scheduled to begin in 2008. CapitolRiver Council agreed to wait, but it was agreed that, if the station area plan did not adequately address the community's issues, a more-detailed Lowertown small area plan could be prepared after station area planning was completed.

The *Downtown Station Area Plan* was adopted in February 2010. Since there were some outstanding Lowertown issues beyond the scope of the station area plan, the *Downtown Station Area Plan* calls for a subsequent Lowertown Master Plan and identifies key issues it should address. It also states that the Lowertown Master Plan should be guided by a community-based task force representing Lowertown's residential, commercial, entertainment, arts and cultural communities.

After much discussion with PED staff about whether the Lowertown planning process would be a staff-led effort (using the Planning Commission's task force process) or a fully-community-led effort, Lowertown community members decided to prepare the small area plan on their own, hiring a consultant team that would report directly to a community task force, with City staff in an advisory/consulting role. The Greater Lowertown Master Plan Task Force (GLMPTF) was created in 2009 to both review the *Downtown Station Area Plan* and begin to craft a Scope of Work for the *Greater Lowertown Master Plan*. The task force roster is listed inside the Plan cover.

By July 2010, the GLMPTF had raised \$165,000 in grants from the Lowertown Future Fund, the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and The Saint Paul Foundation to hire a consultant to prepare the *Greater Lowertown Master Plan*. A multi-disciplinary team, led by the Cuningham Group, was hired in 2010. In 2011, additional funds were raised to add an arts planning consultant to the team.

### **THE GREATER LOWERTOWN MASTER PLAN (GLMP)**

The Greater Lowertown Master Plan Task Force met approximately 15 times over the last two years; hosted four days of focus groups in November 2010 and February 2011; and held three community meetings in November 2010, February 2011 and June 2011. Throughout the planning process, the CapitolRiver Council Board was briefed on major issues and preliminary recommendations. Advice was also sought from past leadership in Lowertown, especially Weiming Lu of the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation. City staff attended all task force meetings, participated in the focus group sessions, advised the task force on consistency with City policy, reviewed drafts of the Plan and helped write some of the language in the final draft. A copy of both the *Plan Summary* and full Plan are attached for your review, but only the *Plan Summary* will be adopted by the City Council.

The **vision** for Lowertown is:

*Lowertown is urban and lush. Historic brick buildings are softened by shade trees, flowers and parks. The neighborhood is alive with residents and visitors. Independent businesses, restaurants and galleries thrive. The Farmers' Market, Union Depot and artists' residences and studios enhance the vitality of Lowertown. Striking Mississippi River vistas, access to safe trails and convenient public transit make Lowertown an inviting community, allowing residents and visitors alike to enjoy the neighborhood without the hassles and costs of a car.*

The GLMP contains **goals, objectives and strategies** based on the chapters of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, with a couple of additional sections to address specific neighborhood issues, such as the arts and environmental sustainability. Three **core values** inform the neighborhood's vision and strategies: **the arts, sustainability and historic preservation**.

The Plan is organized around seven **initiatives**:

1. **Complete the Village**

- Maintain the eclectic residential character of Lowertown.
- Carefully and incrementally add new community-supporting facilities, programs and activities to Lowertown.
- Aggressively pursue sustainability initiatives to develop Lowertown's self-reliance.

2. **Grow the Market**
  - Ensure the longevity of the Farmers' Market in the heart of Lowertown.
  - Make the Farmers' Market site an amenity to the neighborhood throughout the week.
3. **Advance the Arts**
  - Make the arts integral, accessible and visible.
  - Maintain the community as a place for artists to live and work.
  - Encourage the creative skills of artists to be used to address a whole range of neighborhood issues.
4. **Connect to the River**
  - Increase access to and views of the river.
  - Maximize the river for its recreational, restorative and habitat value.
5. **Stitch the Seam**
  - Create a front door to Lowertown, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and the East Side.
  - Connect recreational trails to Lowertown and to the River.
  - Aggressively pursue sustainability initiatives that increase Lowertown's self-reliance.
6. **Preserve the District**
  - Continue to recognize, preserve and celebrate the industrial warehouse character of the Lowertown Historic District.
  - Ensure that every new increment of development enhances the character and value of Lowertown as an historic district.
7. **Evolve the Task Force**

#### **PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION**

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on February 24, 2012. In addition to public testimony, the Commission considered the comments of the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission per Section 73.04 of the Legislative Code. Resolutions from both bodies are attached. The Planning Commission recommends adoption of the *Greater Lowertown Master Plan Summary* as an amendment to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan with a few changes/additions, laid out in our resolution adopted March 23, 2012. In conformance with the Commission's policy to decertify all small area plans older than ten years, the Commission also recommends decertifying the 1994 *Historic Lowertown Plan*.

#### **Attachments**

*Greater Lowertown Master Plan*  
*Greater Lowertown Master Plan Summary*  
Planning Commission Resolution  
Heritage Preservation Commission Resolution