



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: January 17, 2013

TO: Saint Paul City Council
District 6 Planning Council
District 10 Como Community Council

FROM: Michelle Beaulieu, City Planner PED

SUBJECT: Boundary recommendation for Districts 6 and 10

RECOMMENDATION:

The District Council system of Saint Paul is a much lauded public process, which exists to facilitate effective, informed, and representative community participation in local governance issues. The existing Planning Districts were established by the City Council in the late 1970s based on neighborhood groups and community concerns. It is in the interest of serving these goals and meeting the original intent of the system, that PED staff recommends moving the neighborhood of South Como from District 6 to District 10.

BACKGROUND:

The portion of Planning District 6 located west of Dale Street is known as South Como. The area is bounded by Maryland Avenue to the north, Dale to the east, Lexington Avenue to the west and the Burlington Northern Railroad to the south. Over the course of the last year, Councilmember Amy Brendmoen was lobbied by a number of the constituents of Ward 5 to have South Como moved from Planning District 6 to Planning District 10. News sources showed that this was an issue that had been raised at the District Councils numerous times since the inception of the system in 1975.

ANALYSIS AND PUBLIC INPUT:

After the Department of Planning and Economic Development did an analysis of the effects of a proposed change to these Planning District boundaries, it was determined that a rigorous public input process was required. The mission of the District Council system is to facilitate community participation, and the concern was that if the existing structure was not sufficiently serving the residents of South Como, then they would not have had an appropriate opportunity to raise these concerns before. Public input on this issue was received through three avenues:

- Letters and emails received by both the Councilmember's office and the Department of Planning and Economic Development.
- Statements received on Open Saint Paul, the City's official online forum for civic engagement.

- A public meeting held on January 9th, 2013.

Postcards soliciting input and advertising the public meeting were sent out to all property owners in South Como. Letters, emails, and Open Saint Paul statements were accepted through January 16, 2013, one week after the public meeting. Twelve letters and emails were received; 88 statements were made on Open Saint Paul; and 165 people attended the public meeting. *Approximately 90% of all responses supported moving South Como from District 6 to District 10.*

The overwhelming majority of the responses received were in favor of moving the entirety of South Como from Planning District 6 to Planning District 10. At the public meeting, citizens were invited to give testimony explaining their position. All attendees were also invited to indicate their preference, for a boundary change or not, on a map by their property or residential location. This was to determine if there was a stronger preference to be part of District 10 among residents of the northern portion of South Como as opposed to those of the southern portion of South Como, in which case a boundary might be drawn along the "Saint Paul" BNSF railroad line (north of Front). The full statistics of this exercise, and of all of the input received, can be found on the last page of this memo.

From the testimony, letters and emails, and Open Saint Paul statements, there were several common themes supporting the change moving South Como to District 10:

- Due to proximity to Como Park, many residents identify more closely with the issues that arise in District 10 than with those that arise with District 6, and feel that South Como and Como Park tend to get overshadowed by Rice Street-area issues.
- Proximity to the District 10 offices would make South Como residents' participation in District Council issues (and access to certain services) much easier if they were part of District 10. A number of South Como residents stated that they already participate, unofficially and without voting privileges, in District 10's work.
- Recent changes to the Multiple Listing Service for the city have prevented homes in the South Como neighborhood of District 6 from showing up in searches for Como Park, which is felt to be hurting property values in the area.
- Dale Street is a more natural/obvious boundary between District Councils than the current configuration.

There was a common concern against moving only the northern portion of South Como to District 10 and keeping part in District 6:

- That this would only further disenfranchise those living in the portion of South Como remaining in District 6, cutting them off from their neighbors.

There were a few common themes opposing any boundary change:

- Bringing all of Como Park into one Planning District could limit citizen participation in park issues, and decrease the political strength of park concerns.
- That the residents of South Como seem primarily concerned with Como Park, while District 10 has other concerns on its agenda than just the park.

There were also several comments on process in general:

- Disappointment at the lack of an established, formal citywide process for changing District Council boundaries.
- Frustration that South Como residents had not attempted to utilize the existing system to accomplish this change.
- Hope that the residents at the meeting on January 9th will go to District Council meetings and show this level of enthusiasm for other issues, no matter what the resolution of this issue may be.

Based on the responses gained from Open Saint Paul, the testimony received at the public meeting, through this map-dot preference exercise, and from letters and emails to the City, it is clear that among those responding there is a strong preference to have the entire neighborhood of South Como moved from District 6 to District 10.

Following this meeting, both District Councils 6 and 10 have written letters supporting South Como being moved from District 6 to District 10. Therefore, as this boundary change proposal now has a majority of support from all involved parties, it is recommended that the City Council move South Como to Planning District 10.

NEXT STEPS / FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

A formal process for changing District Council boundaries has not yet been established. City staff will come up with a recommended process template for future proposals. Staff recommends that the City Council put in place a moratorium on Planning District boundary changes until after further study of the City's process has been completed.

Changing Planning District boundaries requires City Council action. Should the Council vote to approve this boundary change, there are still administrative changes that will be required of each District organization and of the City as well. Therefore, it is recommended that a Planning District change be approved with an effective date of January 1, 2014 to give all parties adequate time to make the necessary adjustments. In the interim, South Como would continue to be officially represented by District 6. However it is recommended that District 10 begin including the area and its residents in planning and outreach work, particularly with regards to their ongoing District Plan update.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARIES:

Open Saint Paul:

88 people made statements.

81 in favor of moving all of South Como to District 10 **(92%)**

2 in favor of moving South Como north of the Saint Paul line of the BNSF railroad **(2%)**

5 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand **(6%)**

Emails and letters:

12 emails or letters received

10 in favor of moving all of South Como to District 10

2 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand

January 9th Public Meeting:

165 people attended the meeting.

139 people participated in the map-dot exercise:

124 in favor of changing the boundary **(89%)**

15 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand **(11%)**

123 participants were from South Como:

118 in favor of changing the boundary **(96%)**

5 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand **(4%)**

78 South Como participants from north of the Saint Paul line of the BNSF railroad:

77 in favor of changing the boundary **(99%)**

1 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand **(1%)**

45 South Como participants from south of the Saint Paul line of the BNSF railroad:

41 in favor of changing the boundary **(91%)**

4 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand **(9%)**

16 participants were from outside of South Como but within District 6 and 10

6 in favor of changing the boundary **(38%)**

10 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand **(62%)**

24 people spoke:

19 in favor of moving all of South Como into District 10

1 in favor of moving only the northern part of S. Como to D10

1 in favor of keeping the boundaries as they stand

3 did not make a definitive preference known