



DATE: March 6, 2013

TO: Mayor Chris Coleman
Council President Lantry and City Councilmembers

FROM: Barbara Wencl, Chair
Planning Commission

Andy Trcka, Chair
Parks & Recreation Commission

SUBJECT: *Great River Passage Master Plan*

BACKGROUND

The *Great River Passage Master Plan* is the City's long-term plan for unifying the entire length of Saint Paul's Mississippi riverfront (17 miles of river, 26 miles of shoreline) into one grand and comprehensive vision to be realized over the next 30-50 years. The *Great River Passage Master Plan* sets the stage for sustainable parks and open spaces; ecological restoration; economic development; and connection of the city, its neighborhoods and people to the Mississippi River. It builds on 15 years of Saint Paul's efforts to fully realize what an incredible environmental, recreational, physical, economic, cultural and historic resource the Mississippi River is. Starting with the *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework* (1997), these efforts include the Mississippi River Corridor Plan (2001), the Great River Park chapter of the *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework* (2007), district and small area plans, and regional park master plans.

Over the course of nearly two years, the *Great River Passage (GRP) Master Plan* was prepared by a multi-disciplinary consultant team headed by Wenk Associates, based in Denver, CO, working with an inter-departmental City staff team (led by Parks and Recreation) and a 56-member task force/technical advisory group that included representatives from district councils, City Council offices, National Park Service, MN Department of Natural Resources, Ramsey County, Friends of Saint Paul and Ramsey County Parks and Trails, Friends of the Mississippi River, and Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation. Community direction and feedback were gathered at 29 public input sessions, including focus groups, community task force meetings and open houses. In addition, a website was maintained by Parks staff to receive input throughout the two-year planning process on ideas presented at task force meetings and early drafts of the plan.

THE GREAT RIVER PASSAGE MASTER PLAN

The *GRP Master Plan* contains goals, objectives, strategies and projects based on three core principles for riverfront public and private development, established in the *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework*:

- More Natural
- More Urban
- More Connected

The *Master Plan* explores the application of these principles in four sub-areas, or reaches, of the Mississippi River as it travels through Saint Paul:

- The Gorge
- The Valley
- Downtown
- The Floodplain

The *Master Plan* is primarily a parks and open space plan that envisions the river corridor as an interconnected system of parks and trails that not only meets a diverse range of open space and recreational needs, but also serves urban development just beyond the river's public edge.

SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

On June 20, 2012, the Saint Paul Parks Commission took three actions regarding the *Great River Passage Master Plan*:

- forwarded the full *Master Plan*, with changes, to the Planning Commission and City Council for final approval;
- requested that the Planning Commission recommend to the City Council adoption of appropriate sections of the *Master Plan* as part of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan; and
- requested that the City Council adopt the entire *Great River Passage Master Plan* as official City policy to guide public and private investment within the Great River Passage, plan implementation, and administration of the Great River Passage program.

A copy of the Parks and Recreation Commission's resolution is attached.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION COMMENTS

Section 73.04 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code requires the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) to review City "studies" that relate to the architectural heritage of the city. In practice, this authority has been used to allow for HPC comment on area plans, district plans and any other plans being considered as addenda to the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, it is appropriate to have the HPC review the GRP Plan in light of its consistency with the Historic Preservation chapter of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan. The HPC's resolution from September 20, 2012 (amended on January 10, 2013) is attached. Some of the HPC's recommended changes are relevant for the full *GRP Master Plan*; others are relevant only to the Comprehensive Plan Addendum.

The key issues raised by the HPC are:

- The *GRP Master Plan* stresses interpretation of historic and cultural resources almost to the exclusion of protection.
- There should be a map showing designated sites within the Great River Passage in order to establish a baseline for the recommended inventory/survey work.
- The HPC is ready to be a strong partner with Parks and Recreation staff to implement the preservation strategies in the GRP.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

After considering public testimony at a public hearing held on September 21, 2012, the Planning Commission took the following actions:

- recommended several changes to the Comprehensive Plan Addendum to respond to public testimony and comments from the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission;
- with these changes, found the *GRP Master Plan, Proposed Addendum to Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan* consistent with the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan; and
- with these changes, recommended adoption of the *GRP Master Plan Proposed Addendum to Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan* by the Saint Paul City Council.

The Planning Commission resolution is attached.

A PLAN IN TWO PARTS

Our Commissions are recommending adoption of the *GRP Master Plan* by the City Council in two ways:

- adoption of the entire document as general City policy, including strategy and project recommendations, and a proposed administrative structure to staff the effort; and
- adoption of certain sections of the *Master Plan* as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan.

Adoption of the Entire GRP Master Plan

The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission recommends adoption of the full document, which contains specific parks projects and a strategic plan to organize the Department of Parks and Recreation to focus on the GRP.

Adoption of Certain Sections of the GRP Master Plan as Part of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan

The Planning Commission (at the recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Commission) recommends adoption of appropriate sections of the *Great River Passage Master Plan* as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan in order to:

- align the goals and objectives of the GRP with those of the other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, especially land use, transportation, and parks and recreation; and
- ensure that the *GRP Master Plan* is official City planning policy, and therefore guides public and private investment within the Passage.

The sections of the GRP recommended for adoption as part of the Comprehensive Plan include:

- general goals and objectives, by principle (more natural, more urban more connected) and reach (Gorge, Valley, Downtown and Floodplain);
- graphics that illustrate key planning and design concepts; and
- goals and objectives related to regional park vision plans, with corresponding graphics.

FINAL PLAN DRAFT

Throughout the plan preparation process (and long after completion of the formal task force phase), Parks staff have maintained extraordinary openness to recommended text and graphics changes from the Technical Advisory Group, Community Task Force, other interested parties and the general public. Innumerable corrections and clarifications have been made along the way, and are reflected in the final draft version of the full document attached for your adoption. Assuming the City Council adopts the final changes being recommended by our Commissions, final versions of both the *Great River Passage Master Plan* (full document) and Comprehensive Plan Addendum will be prepared and made available on the City's web site.

JOINT RECOMMENDATION

To summarize, the Parks and Recreation Commission and Planning Commission recommend that the City Council:

- adopt the entire *Great River Passage Master Plan* as official City policy to guide public and private investment within the Great River Passage, plan implementation, and administration of the Great River Passage program; and
- adopt certain sections of the *Master Plan* as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan (with changes laid out in the Planning Commission resolution).

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Attachments

- ✓ Full *Great River Passage Master Plan*
- ✓ *Great River Passage Addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan*
- ✓ Parks and Recreation Resolution
- ✓ Heritage Preservation Commission Resolution
- ✓ Planning Commission Resolution