



*Working to protect the Mississippi River
and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.*

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April 18, 2019

Betsy Reveal, Chair
City of Saint Paul Planning Commission
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Re: Comments on the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Plan, a chapter of St. Paul's 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Dear Chair Reveal,

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a local non-profit organization that works to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities metropolitan region. We have more than 2,700 active members, 3,500 volunteers and 2,000 advocates who care deeply about the river's unique resources.

FMR takes an active interest in working with municipalities, counties, state government, and other stakeholders to help shape and influence decisions that impact the health of the river. FMR was founded and continues to play a leadership role in ensuring that the public resources of our National Park —the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA), are preserved for current and future generations to benefit from.

FMR has been working with the city of Saint Paul and other stakeholders for many years to restore and revitalize the Mississippi River Corridor. We appreciate that city staff met with FMR and provided us with an opportunity to comment on the draft MRCCA Plan before it was released to the public. A number of our comments and concerns were addressed through revisions to the final draft plan, and some were not. For example, city staff expanded the MRCCA Plan policies in response to our suggestions, and we are pleased to see a more robust set of policies to address resource protection. These stronger policies will provide a solid foundation for the regulations that will be included in St. Paul's MRCCA ordinance.

We have valued opportunities to work in partnership with the city, and we look forward to continuing to have a productive relationship with city staff and leadership moving forward. As such, we respectfully submit the following comments regarding the Draft Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Plan for the City of Saint Paul.

MRCCA Districts and Development Conflicts

In our earlier comments we pointed out the plan needed to fulfill the following plan requirement:

“Explain how future land uses (and potential redevelopment plans) fit the purpose of the MRCCA districts and identify potential conflicts.” -- MRCCA Districts Requirements document, Metropolitan Council Local Planning Handbook

The revised plan discusses four locations within the corridor with potential conflicts between the MRCCA Districts, the Future Land Use districts and/or zoning: the Ford site, Shepard-Davern, West Side Flats and Pig’s Eye. The sites/areas identified here are planning development that will revitalize the river corridor with new residents and businesses, but the city needs to balance that with ensuring the river’s natural resources, public access and scenic views are not negatively impacted by new development.

The narrative on page 220 of St. Paul’s MRCCA plan states the following:

“These are areas where Saint Paul may pursue flexibility in building height and/or district designation in the MRCCA ordinance.”

This statement concerns us. The establishment of the MRCCA districts was an extensive process that included input from a broad range of stakeholders, including many St. Paul residents. Furthermore, MRCCA rules include the following provision:

*6106.0400 Subp. 4. **Conflicting standards.** In case of a conflict between this chapter and any other rule or ordinance, the more protective provision applies.*

We recommend revising the narrative on page 220 of St. Paul’s MRCCA Plan as suggested below.

“These are areas where Saint Paul will need to strike a balance between the economic and social benefits of redevelopment and the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the Mississippi River. The city will utilize the criteria provided in the MRCCA rules to evaluate potential visual impacts of additional height, and if/when mitigation is needed. In some cases the city may pursue flexibility in building height and/or district designation in the MRCCA ordinance.”

The plan already includes several policies that provide a strong foundation for this approach, including:

Policy CA-1. Guide land use and development activities consistent with the management purpose of each of the MRCCA districts.

Policy CA-2. Protect Primary Conservation Areas through planning, land use and land alteration regulations, and other tools.

Policy CA-3. Minimize impacts to PCAs from public and private development and land use activities.

Policy CA-10. Regulate building height, placement and design consistent with the intent of the MRCCA rules to protect, enhance and minimize impacts to Public River Corridor Views.

Policy CA-11. Protect and minimize impacts to PRCVs from public development activities.

Policy CA-12. Consider designated Public River Corridor Views from other communities in developing dimensional standards, view impact evaluation procedures, and mitigation identification procedures.

Policy CA-13. Support shorter buildings closer to the river's edge and taller buildings as distance from the river increases in order to maximize views of and from the river, and preserve visual access to the river as a public good (rather than privatized right).

St. Paul's Unique River Resources

In our earlier comments, we suggested the plan should identify and describe river resources, especially those that are specific or unique to St. Paul. Some descriptive language was added to the introductory narrative for several sections of the plan, but most of our suggested additions (provided below) were not included.

Although the MRCCA rules are quite prescriptive, there will be developers seeking variances and conditional use permits. The rules also provide guidance for municipalities to make decisions about these discretionary actions (MRCCA Rules 6106.0800), but most of those provisions, including mitigation, are based on protection of resources identified in the city's MRCCA plan.

The City needs to anticipate potential threats to these key resources and make sure that the MRCCA Plan includes the tools needed to address those issues should they arise.

We recommend adding the following information to the plan or its appendices

- Identify specific regional parks, trails, overlooks, marinas and landings by name, along with a brief description that highlights key resources and recreational assets within each park. For example, a description of Indian Mounds Regional Park could highlight walking trails with spectacular urban views, large natural woodlands and planted prairies, and historically significant Native American burial mounds.
- Identify the names and/or places of specific resources within the corridor, such as lakes (Crosby, Pickerel, Pig's Eye, etc.), tributaries and waterfalls.
- Identify names and/or places of existing wetlands and their general condition general type/condition (healthy degraded, restored, etc.)

- Identify names and/or places of existing forests, woodlands and prairies and their general type/condition (healthy degraded, restored, etc.)
- Identify and describe the significance of the Mississippi Gorge
- Identify and describe primary and secondary bluffs, where they intersect with developed areas (such as Highwood) and where views of the bluffs are especially significant (such as Gorge, West Side Flats, Indian Mounds)
- Identify general condition of public river shoreline, especially where it is in need of repair or erosion control.

Public River Corridor Views

The city did a nice job on this section. It includes a list of 46 Public River Corridor Views (PRCVs) and the descriptions are helpful. In our earlier comments we identified 7 additional viewpoints we think should be included. Only one of those suggestions (view from Pike Island, or Bdote) was added to the final draft. Although the city's list of views is robust, there are some sites within the valley and at the river's edge that were overlooked and we'd like to see them included in the city's inventory of PRCVs.

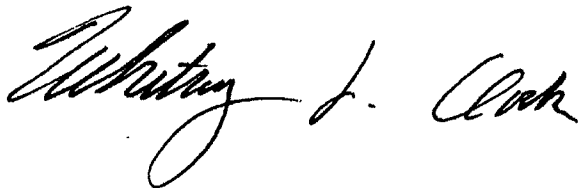
Some additional St. Paul views for your consideration:

- View from Pike Island looking up towards the Shepard-Davern site
- View from Pike Island towards Watergate Marina/Crosby Farm
- View from Crosby Farm along the river trail
- Harriet Island – view from south entrance through floodwall
- Harriet Island – view from Kelly's landing
- View from Vento Sanctuary towards the river valley
- View from Bayfield Street, past Holman Field

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the city's draft MRCCA plan. We appreciate the constructive relationship between St. Paul and FMR and that you value and respect our input.

If you have additional questions or wish to discuss the content of this letter, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director

Tom Dimond
2119 Skyway Drive
Saint Paul, MN 55119

April 18, 2019

RE: The proposed rules for our National Park fail to protect and enhance the natural resources and recreational opportunities within our National Park. We can and must do better to protect and enhance the natural resources and recreational potential within our National Park.

We deserve better.

As a Veteran, I came home to Watergate and a great distrust of government, false body counts, claims that Agent Orange, depleted uranium and DDT were safe. The government entrusted to protect us and the world we live in were lying or horribly ill informed.

I have had the honor to serve my country in the Army and as an elected official. It is of utmost importance that at home and abroad the public is treated with respect and we can trust our government.

In an increasingly complex world it is ever more important that our government protect the public interest from exploitation by large corporate interests that receive millions in public taxpayer subsidies while degrading our air, land and water. This is particularly true when it comes to protection of the planet and the diverse eco systems that sustain life and biodiversity.

Passenger pigeons were a beautiful bird that could darken the sky for hours when a flock flew overhead. Every last one of the species was killed. Buffaloes used to travel in such great herds the ground would shake. They narrowly avoided extinction. Today, we continue to lose species.

All too often we are lulled into inaction by assurances that are unsupported by the facts. Efforts to ban DDT save the Bald Eagle and other species happened because the public was not complacent. Speaking out and demanding change to protect nature and natural areas is essential. We should demand no less. As a City, we should be a leader in protecting and enhancing the natural habitat, wildlife and recreational opportunities. This is the least we can do for future generations and mother nature. These are the basic building blocks of a sustainable future. We are the Capitol of Minnesota. Tourism, health care and innovation are vital components of our economy. Our Comprehensive Plan should advance Saint Paul as a leader in medical care, medical technology, tourism and healthy living. We can do this in a City with a National Park at the heart of our City. Having the Mississippi River as our front yard creates a natural spine and clear connection to join our riverfront neighborhoods and resources highlighting our strengths and opportunities.

Going forward, all of our efforts in the National Park should be based on protecting and enhancing the natural resources and recreational opportunities for the benefit of people, wildlife, plants and our planet. We must put aside the old thinking that you enhance your City by incrementally degrading our natural resources and planet and leaving a depleted

world for future generations. Agent Orange, DDT, ozone depletion, global warming, species eradication, and frequent 100 year storms tell us the time to change our ways is now. Future generations deserve better from us. The National Park can serve as a valuable lab for restoration of habitat, pollution cleanup, species restoration, and enhanced health and economic benefits of cleaning up our environment and enhanced recreation and tourism.

Our National Park includes the internationally known Mississippi River, and renowned North American watershed and flyway. It is vital to the survival of a wide variety of birds, and wildlife. We can restore the native fish, mussel, and clam populations of the Mississippi. The river itself and wetlands can be restored as an amazing fish producing area of unique species. Small watercraft can once again join other recreational watercraft. We can expanded opportunities to safely explore water and shore land experiences that have been largely denied to generations of Minnesotans. The public and wildlife will regain public access with restoration of the natural river. Parts of Manhattan has been revitalized by creating parkland on an abandoned elevated rail line. Think what the naturalization of our Nation's most famous river can do to spur recreational use of the Mississippi River in a National Park. It will be transformative in nature as we restore our natural connection to the river. Residents and visitors will be free to spend time on the water and in nature at our collective doorstep. How more Minnesotan can you get.

1. Map CA-1 Future Land Uses in the MRCCA should be corrected to reflect their State Designation of CA-ROS protected lands in the floodplain. The map shows planned parkland designated as industrial development in wetlands.

2. Map CA-1 Districts should include lakes and wetlands as part of the designated districts. This should be included on the maps.

3. Map CA-1 Property designated as ROS and CA-RN in Highwood are incorrectly designated as transportation development districts when they are not zoned for transportation development, are designated CA-ROS and CA-RN and abut single family residential and public parkland.

4. The City should support the compromise on building heights within the National Park. The City participated in the rulemaking process. The City pushed for increasing building heights over previously adopted City policy. Saint Paul was granted increased heights in some cases as part of a compromise. The City should not seeking additional roll backs of Critical Area protections.

5. Page 221 Floodplain Reach should change "high speed highway" to "Great River Road National Scenic Byway and MRT Mississippi River Trail". The official road and trail designations. Add - The Great River Passage calls for trail connections to connect the Highwood neighborhood bluff parks and trails with and the riverfront parkland and trails of Pig's Eye Regional Park.

6. Page 234 Map CA-4 does not include Pine Creek that follows Lower Afton Road on the north side and Ogden Creek that follows the Ogden Road right of way down the bluff.

7. Page 243 Map CA -10 Public River Corridor Views View 46 has expansive views of Pig's Eye Lake, and Downtown Saint Paul and Minneapolis in the background from the public parkland overlooks along Skyway Drive, View 47 are panoramic views of Eagle and Pig's Eye lakes, the Heron Rookery and oak savanna, View 48 is the 360 degree panoramic view of Pig's Eye Lake, the bluffs and Downtown from the boat ramp on the south shore of Pig's Eye.

8. Page 237 Map CA-7 Include the existing boat ramp at the north end of Red Rock Road within the regional park. The Great River Passage calls for canoe/kayak access at this location.

9. Page 237 Map CA - 7 fleeting areas shown on the map should match the agreed to existing fleeting compromise contained in the existing list and map.

10. Page 226 Policy CA-21 change to reflect true factual information contained in the State Transportation Plans. The statement that the "working river" is integral to the economies of Saint Paul, the Twin Cities, Metropolitan Area, Greater Minnesota and the Upper Midwest is not even remotely true. Minneapolis went through a recent planning process that determined eliminating barge shipments and redeveloping the property for the highest and best use would provide greater economic and livability benefits for residents of Minneapolis.

State of Minnesota transportation plans indicate Saint Paul should follow Minneapolis and consider the benefits of riverfront redevelopment for housing and jobs similar to Upper Landing, and the Ford site. MN DOT State Transportation plans point out that barge shipments from Saint Paul are insignificant in the overall transportation system. The better question is why Saint Paul homeowners and State taxpayer are spending millions to subsidize shipments for foreign conglomerates. In 2013 Mississippi River barge shipments of almost 9.2 million tons included 5.5 million tons shipped from Saint Paul. Minnesota Great Lakes shipments included 58 million tons.

In 2012, 1 billion tons of freight shipped in Minnesota. Saint Paul barge shipments amounted to 0%. In 2040, 1.8 billion tons of freight are predicted to ship in Minnesota. Saint Paul's share of MN freight shipments is predicted to shrink.

In 2012, \$912 billion of freight shipped in Minnesota. 0% shipped on barges from Saint Paul. In 2040, \$2.3 trillion of freight is predicted to ship in Minnesota. Saint Paul's share is predicted to shrink.

April 19, 2019

RE: MRCCA comments at Planning Commission public hearing

Hello, I'm Shirley Erstad, Executive Director of Friends of the Parks and Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County, a non-profit established in 1985. Our original executive director and a founding member, Peggy Lynch, and her sister, Marilyn Lundberg, also a founding member, were deeply involved with the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) from its beginnings in the 1970's.

Sam Morgan, whose name you may recognize because it shows up multiple times in the MRCCA chapter in reference to the Regional Trail named after him, was also a founding member.

United States Senator David Durenberger, a current board member, together with the late United States Congressperson, Bruce Vento, introduced the legislation in Congress to make the Critical Area also a National Park.

We undertake the work of this chapter with a very critical eye and deep sense of responsibility. The river is the birthplace of St. Paul as we know it and the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers is a sacred site to the Native Americans who arrived here before we did.

The districts reflect regulatory requirements to balance protection of flora, fauna, and other natural resources, transportation and industry that very much make this a working river, areas of historical and cultural significance, and the potential for humans to live, work, recreate and just plain relax within the Critical Area.

We appreciate the additional language regarding native vegetation, public river corridor views, erosion, remediation of contaminated sites in the river corridor and improved public access. We especially appreciate encouraging connection of land in the CA-SR district to existing and planned parks and trails.

We appreciate the addition of bluff impact zones to Map CA-10: Public River Corridor Views in order to emphasize their importance.

The addition of photographs and descriptions highlighting views throughout the corridor are not only helpful for geographical orientation but also help the reader understand what a magnificent and diverse landscape this chapter deals with.

Figure I-7, the implementation chart, shows the timeline for all but one of these items as short-term. Looks like it's time to get to work. Thank you.

Our approach to the Critical Area is deeply rooted in the past, recognizing the vision of those who protected it for us, while also looking forward to the future and our responsibility to care for this unique landscape for those who will come after us.

Living in an urban environment, it is so very important that all our citizens have access to nature and not just those who can afford to “go to a cabin up north”. With the advancement of technology and limiting screen time being an important part of child-rearing these days, kids need increased opportunities to play outdoors. Our kids of today will be taking care of our planet tomorrow.

Bearing all that in mind, I am grateful to come before you today to say, “thank you” to the staff and my fellow citizens and community leaders who shaped this document. When the MRCCA rule revisions were first proposed by the DNR at the beginning of this process a few years ago, the approach seemed less focused on protecting this invaluable resource.

The current draft has added language that has addressed our concerns.

Shirley Erstad