



CITY OF SAINT PAUL

Christopher B. Coleman, Mayor

*25 West Fourth Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102*

*Telephone: 651-266-6700
Facsimile: 651-228-3220*

Date: June 22, 2011
To: Mayor Coleman and the City Council
From: Planning Commission
Subject: Adoption of the Hamline, Victoria, and Western Station Area Plans

Background

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Hamline, Victoria, and Western Station Area Plans on February 18, 2011. Fourteen people spoke, and staff received four additional letters from CommonBond Communities, the Land Use Committee of the Union Park District Council, Daisy Huang (Shuang Hur Supermarket), and the Preserve and Benefit Historic Rondo Committee.

The attached April 7 memo outlines the public hearing comments, which are focused on a number of issue areas: parks and play space, the World Cultural Heritage District, Skyline Tower and its residents, the Old Home site, and parking/access. The proposed changes were discussed at the Comprehensive Planning Committee and forwarded the full Planning Commission for approval.

On April 15, 2011, the Planning Commission approved the recommended changes to the station area plans drafts. Staff is forwarding the plans, as amended, for adoption as addenda to the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, a chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan.



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
Christopher B. Coleman, Mayor

*25 West Fourth Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102*

*Telephone: 651-266-6565
Facsimile: 651-228-3261*

Date: April 7, 2011
To: Planning Commission
From: Comprehensive Planning Committee
Subject: Review of public hearing comments on Hamline, Victoria, and Western Station Area Plans

Background

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Hamline, Victoria, and Western Station Area Plans on February 18, 2011. Fourteen people spoke, and staff received four additional letters from CommonBond Communities, the Land Use Committee of the Union Park District Council, Daisy Huang (Shuang Hur Supermarket), and the Preserve and Benefit Historic Rondo Committee.

This memo summarizes the issues raised and presents staff comments and recommendations for the Committee to consider as it forwards the station area plans to the full Planning Commission.

The public hearing drafts of the Hamline, Victoria, and Western Station Area Plans are available online at <http://www.stpaul.gov/centralcorridor> (click on "Station Area Plans" and then on "Hamline, Victoria, and Western").

Overview of public hearing comments

The comments focused on a number of issue areas: parks and play space, the World Cultural Heritage District, Skyline Tower and its residents, the Old Home site, and parking/access.

1. Parks and Play Space

Comment. Triesta Brown, Annie Johnson (Union Park), Deb Lande (Common Bond), and Zeinab Ahyusuf spoke about the need for park space and play areas for children, particularly in the Hamline station area, and expressed concern about whether the Hamline Station Area Plan's recommendations for parks are sufficient and meet the needs of the community as a whole. There were particular concerns around the inclusion of a skate park concept in the plan.

Committee Comment. The Hamline Station Area Plan recommends introducing new recreational opportunities and creating new neighborhood park spaces as a Public Realm "Key Move":

There is a need for a larger recreation space within the station area to serve neighborhood youth. A larger neighborhood park space would provide local residents with the opportunity to participate in active recreational activities without having to cross I-94 ... the incorporation of a

destination attraction, such as a BMX track or skate park, should be strongly considered. The location of these facilities should be determined by balancing programmatic needs alongside a consideration of proximity to transit and the ability to serve the existing residents of Skyline Tower. (p. 20)

While the text of the plan indicates that a skate park is just one option for neighborhood park space, the caption on the photo of a skate park that accompanies the “key move” text is less clear. The caption states, “The creation of a new Urban Park in the Hamline Station Area containing an ‘alternative sport attraction’ such as a skate plaza would provide expanded recreation opportunities for neighborhood youth.”

Another Hamline station area Key Move is to create new community open spaces:

As the Midway shopping district continues to intensify over time, there will be a greater need for new open spaces throughout the station area. These smaller community gathering spaces will provide places of respite and relaxation within an intensifying mixed-use district and create excellent opportunities for expressions of public art. (p. 20)

Committee Recommendation. Remove the word “strongly” from the “key move” text and edit the photo caption to clarify that a skate park is just an option. Consider replacing the skate park photo with a different representation of neighborhood park space.

2. World Cultural Heritage District

Comment. Tait Danielson Castillo, Hai Truong, and Daisy Huang expressed concerns about the inclusion of the World Cultural Heritage District (WCHD) in the station area plans because of a perceived lack of business owner involvement in the initiative and potential confusion between this branding effort and other recently completed efforts to brand Frogtown.

Committee Comment. The WCHD concept has been included in multiple Central Corridor planning documents to date. The Central Corridor Development Strategy names the WCHD as one of the “90 Initiatives for the Corridor,” and the station area plans for Dale and Rice both mention the WCHD. The visions for the Western and Victoria station areas both include references to the WCHD as a defining characteristic of the station areas that has the potential to attract visitors. The vision for Victoria is for, in part, “an inclusive, multicultural neighborhood focused around an attractive low-rise ‘main street’ that is part of the World Cultural Heritage District and reflects the smaller neighborhood feel of the area.” The Western station area vision states that, “As part of the World Cultural Heritage District, the area will be a destination for visitors from across the region.” Neither plan contains specific policies relating to the WCHD, however, or any substantial discussion of the WCHD concept.

Committee Recommendation. Remove references to the WCHD from the Western and Victoria Station Area Plan visions.

3. Skyline Tower

Comment. Ahmad Hasan, Hadi Khalq, Zeinab Ahyusuf, Esmarl Guye, and Deb Lande testified about Skyline Tower (located within the Hamline station area) and the concerns of residents. The three main issues discussed were safety, particularly for pedestrians; the lack of job opportunities; and the need for more community space.

Residents cited concerns about a lack of sidewalks, safe street crossings, and pedestrian amenities, which are particularly important for people who don't own cars and for the many children who live in Skyline Tower (300 children under 18). The walk from Skyline to the Hamline station is a key pedestrian pathway.

There were also a number of concerns expressed about the need for community space, open space, and play spaces for children, some of which are discussed under the "Parks and Play Space" heading above. Gathering places for elders and fitness opportunities for women were also mentioned as needs.

Unemployment among Skyline Tower residents was a major concern for the people who testified. Testimony focused on the need to create more opportunities for residents to build their job skills, find jobs as part of the light rail construction, start businesses, and build wealth.

Committee Comment. The reintroduction of the street grid through the Midway shopping area is a key element of the Hamline Station Area Plan, which will create more walkable blocks, enhance connectivity, and add pedestrian amenities. The Hamline Station Area Plan includes two Public Realm Key Moves related to pedestrian safety in the area around Skyline Tower: (1) Strengthen the Character and Walkability of the North/South Streets (p. 19), and (2) Reestablish and Urban Network of Public Streets and Blocks South of University (p. 20). The plan identifies Syndicate as a particularly important connection between the Hamline station and Skyline Tower, and recommends providing amenities such as pedestrian-oriented lighting, seating, and garbage receptacles to make it easier to walk to and from the LRT (p. 19). Enhancing the safety of pedestrian crossings of Hamline is also emphasized (p. 19).

Some of the recreation/open space issues that were concerns for Skyline Tower residents are discussed above. The need for new open spaces in the Hamline station area is addressed in the station area plan as Key Moves in the Public Realm section (Create New Community Open Spaces and Introduce New Recreational Opportunities). The Key Moves cover the creation of gathering spaces for community members, meeting recreational needs of youth, and providing culturally specific recreation programming (such as women's only recreation hours or events) .

While the plan for Hamline includes a vision of redevelopment at a scale that would provide many new opportunities for employment in the future, the plan does not include near-term employment solutions for the residents of Skyline Tower. For people interested in light rail construction work, however, there are a number of organizations and initiatives that may be helpful:

- LRT Works (<http://www.lrtworks.org>) – a Web site for people seeking construction work. The site allows people to submit contact info that may be shared with construction firms or trade unions seeking workers for LRT and other government construction projects. It also provides information on construction training programs, contact info for contractors, links to community resources, and information on other construction projects.
- MEDA (Metropolitan Economic Development Association, <http://www.meda.net/>) – an organization that provides assistance to businesses owned and managed by entrepreneurs

of color. They offer one-on-one business consulting, training, leadership development, government contracting assistance, access to financing, networking with peers, assistance with minority certifications, and strategic planning.

- Summit Academy OIC (<http://www.saoic.org>) – a community-based vocational training and job-placement program. Summit Academy offers 20-week courses in construction (including weatherization, plumbing, sheet metal working, welding, and heavy equipment operating) as well as job-placement assistance.

Committee Recommendation. No change.

4. Old Home Site

Comment. Geoff Murphy and Michael Dolan offered testimony about the difficulty of reusing the Old Home building, which sits on the southeast corner of the Western/University intersection. The building has not been maintained in recent years because the cost of maintenance is too high, and the building has become structurally unstable.

Committee Comment. The Western Station Area Plan says:

The historic 46,000 square foot Minnesota Milk Building, anchoring the corner of Western and University at the Old Home site, was originally built in 1912 and updated to its current Art Deco design in 1932. Though vacant, the current building is a prominent structure within the station area and should be restored and reused as a component of any redevelopment scheme for the site. (p. 28)

The redevelopment of the Old Home site is an opportunity to introduce new uses (housing, businesses, etc.) right next to the Western station. The plan also envisions a new public space on the eastern edge of the site at Virginia. While these redevelopment goals are important elements of the plan, the preservation of the Old Home building is also desirable. The building has been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and it is a valuable placemaking structure in a neighborhood that has lost many of its historic resources over time, especially during the urban renewal era of blight removal and highway construction.

Committee Recommendation. Change the language in the Western Station Area Plan to say that while reuse of the Minnesota Milk Building is preferred, it is not required: “Though vacant, the current building is a prominent structure within the station area. An ideal redevelopment scheme for the site would include restoration and reuse of the Minnesota Milk Building, if economically and architecturally feasible.”

5. Parking/Access

Comment. Hai Truong and Keith Johnson expressed concerns regarding parking, and suggested the exploration of reinstating parking on University Avenue by reducing the street to one traffic lane in each direction. Triesta Brown discussed alley usage and the need for targeted alley enhancements and snow plowing. Veronica Burt (Preserve and Benefit Historic Rondo) requested additions to the parking

strategies in the Victoria and Western plans that would explore “permit parking relief” to mitigate the cost of any future residential parking permits.

Committee Comment. The City has committed to study the potential for adding parking back on to University Avenue once LRT is operational. This was reflected in the draft station area plans with the following text:

As LRT ridership matures, the City should reevaluate the number of traffic lanes on University Avenue and explore a range of enhanced bicycle accommodation options, as well as the reintroduction of on-street parking and deliveries to better serve businesses and to help buffer pedestrian activity from automobile traffic. (p. 42)

At the request of the Mayor and Councilmember Stark, interdepartmental staff are meeting next month to begin studying the re-introduction of parking on University Avenue. The analysis will take into account a number of impacts and opportunities associated with reducing traffic to one lane in each direction, and will assess the feasibility of a pilot that would begin this year as construction is completed in each segment.

City staff are currently collecting data and utilization information to study possible changes to the residential permit parking system. The permit parking system is likely to be expanded into neighborhoods adjacent to the LRT in order to protect residential parking from commercial and commuter overflow. Public Works currently charges \$10 per permit per year. Planning staff feel that this charge is not overly onerous to residents who own cars and wish to park in the public right of way (comparatively, the average annual cost to own a car is estimated at \$9,519¹). Because the \$10 charge does not currently cover the staff hours needed to administer the program, a permit subsidy or relief program is not warranted at this time.

Alley access and maintenance have continued to be a major focus in access mitigation planning and the design and construction of the light rail line. The drafts include several alley-related recommendations to address concerns about safety, appearance, snow plowing, stormwater management, maintenance, and circulation.

The City should study and propose strategies for operation and maintenance of major city systems within the Central Corridor, including snow plowing and/or removal, alley circulation and maintenance, deliveries and loading, safety and security, refuse and recycling, medians and streetscape landscaping, street furniture, right-of-way acquisition, stormwater management, and other city systems that will be impacted. The study should address strategies both for the construction period and for more long-term permanent solutions. (p. 43)

The function, access and appearance of alleys shall be improved through targeted rehabilitation, enhanced lighting, and consolidated commercial parking and will serve as a buffer, rather than blight, to adjacent residential uses. (p. 14)

A targeted alley program aimed at improving the condition, maintenance and character of the alleys will help to support their expanded role and enhance the safety and comfort of users. Opportunities for enhanced paving, pedestrian lighting and the integration of stormwater

¹ Source: AAA “[Your Driving Cost](#)” Study, 2010. Costs calculated for a medium sized automobile driven 15,000 miles per year.

management features such as permeable paving, rain gardens or expandable tree grates should be explored. The shared commercial/residential alleys present unique opportunities for works of public art, such as murals, that can help enhance their attractiveness to members of the community. (p. 20)

A targeted program of clean-up, maintenance and alley enhancements should explore opportunities for new paving, enhanced lighting, public art and the integration of stormwater management features such as permeable paving and rain-gardens. Alleys shared between commercial and residential uses should incorporate elements to buffer commercial traffic and noise. (p. 27)

There should be a focus on beautification, greening, and safety in residential alleys. Residents should be encouraged to install lighting on the alley and to remove blight and overgrowth from the area adjacent to their properties. Residential stormwater management techniques can help limit flooding and pooling, which can erode and damage alleys over time. (p. 31)

Create a Parking Improvement District to fund alley enhancements and shared off street parking solutions, streetscape improvements, snow removal and the cost of operating a shared parking facility. (p. 32)

Additionally, the City has recently dedicated \$350,000 of CIB funding towards alley repaving in the Central Corridor, as well as \$100,000 to implement a residential buffering demonstration project. Fifteen alleys, many shared by commercial and residential uses, will be repaved in 2011 using these funds.

Committee Recommendation. As the existing plans consistently and adequately address concerns about on-street parking and alleys, no change to the text is recommended.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Comprehensive Planning Committee recommends that the Planning Commission approve these proposed responses and recommended changes to the station area plans drafts and forward the plans, as amended, to the Mayor and City Council for adoption as addenda to the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, a chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan. A draft Planning Commission resolution is attached.

city of saint paul
planning commission resolution
file number 11-27
date April 15, 2011

**Recommendation of
Hamline, Victoria, and Western Station Area Plans**

WHEREAS, Mayor Coleman asked the Planning Commission to prepare a *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, which is a vision and strategy for how University Avenue and the downtown area should grow and change in response to the planned investment in the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit (LRT) line; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and City Council adopted the *Central Corridor Development Strategy* on October 24, 2007 as a chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, the *Central Corridor Development Strategy* recommended station area planning as a next step to further plan for desired development along the Central Corridor; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Coleman asked the Planning Commission to establish a community Steering Committee to prepare seven *Station Area Plans* for Westgate, Raymond, Fairview, Snelling, Lexington, Dale, and Rice;

WHEREAS, the Mayor and City Council adopted the Central Corridor LRT Station Area Plans for Rice, Dale, Lexington, Snelling, Fairview, Raymond, and Westgate, plus the Introduction chapter and Implementation chapter, called Moving Forward, as addenda to the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, a chapter of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, on October 22, 2008; and

moved by Merrigan
seconded by _____
in favor Unanimous
against _____

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WHEREAS, the Planning Commission established the Hamline, Western, and Victoria Station Area Planning Steering Committee to oversee the station area planning process for the “infill” stations, with members appointed by the Planning Commission chair; and

WHEREAS, the Steering Committee was representative of the affected areas in terms of geography, constituencies, and areas of expertise; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Steering Committee was to oversee the process, and to ensure consistency in approach between station areas and policy consistency with the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, and other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, the bulk of the work to develop the station area plans was done through an open public process using a combination of focus groups; public roundtables; design workshops or charrettes; and open houses; and

WHEREAS, the Steering Committee completed its work on July 14, 2010, and recommended three draft station area plans to the Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held public hearings on the drafts plans on February 18, 2011, notice of which was sent to the Early Notification System list, individuals and organizations on the Central Corridor notification list, and all property owners within the station areas; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission considered the public testimony, both verbal and written, and developed responses and recommended minor modifications to the plan language in response to the testimony; and

WHEREAS, the responses and recommendations are incorporated in a memo to the Commission from its Comprehensive Planning Committee, dated April 7, 2011; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission is authorized under Minnesota Statutes Section 462.355(2) and Chapter 107 of the Saint Paul Administrative Code to recommend to the Mayor and City Council amendments to the Comprehensive Plan;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Saint Paul Planning Commission hereby recommends to the Mayor and City Council adoption of the Central Corridor LRT Station Area Plans for Hamline, Victoria, and Western, as addenda to the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, a chapter of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan; and

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission hereby directs the Planning Administrator to forward the station area plans to the Mayor and City Council for their review and adoption.