

April 3, 2013

City Council
City of Saint Paul

Dear City Councilmembers:

The Mississippi River runs for five miles within Highland Park and defines more than 50 percent of the neighborhood boundary. The Gorge, Hidden Falls, Cosby Farm, Watergate Marina and Shepard Road areas are predominant features of the Highland Park neighborhood. The Great River Passage Master Plan has the potential for tremendous impact on our neighborhood and the Highland District Council has devoted more time and energy to this issue than any other in recent memory.

The Highland District Council has made it a priority to be involved in the GRP Plan. The HDC provided representatives on the GRP Community Task Force, reviewed and discussed iterations of the GRP Plan, and hosted discussions with Friends of the Parks and Friends of the Mississippi. While the Highland District Council is supportive of the GRP Master Plan's intent to create a long-term vision for Saint Paul's river area parklands, the final plan and process has raised several concerns:

- The length and complexity of the GRP Master Plan and Comprehensive Plan make it nearly impossible for neighborhood citizens and board members to thoroughly understand and formulate feedback on the GRPMP and GRP's fit with the City's Comprehensive Plan.
- Although the GRP Master Plan development process appears to be thorough, there is significant reaction at the neighborhood level that the process was not very inclusive or reflective of citizen input.
- It is unclear from the GRP Master Plan document whether there will be a formal community notification and hearing process followed before individual Great River Passage projects are implemented or whether updates to the Comprehensive Plan and adoption of the GRP Master Plan constitutes blanket support and approval for all elements of the GRP Master Plan.
 - For example, certain specific projects within the plan, such as the addition of on-street bike lanes, significant changes to vehicular thoroughfares, or major capital investments in flood areas or the Ford site, need more extensive vetting. In the past these types of changes have included District Council action or updates to Small Areas Plans.
- There is significant concern with the Plan's *Chapter 7 – Delivering the Vision*, which advocates for increased annual expense, expansion of the Parks department structure, creation of new authorities, and prioritization of fund-seeking for new Great River Passage projects. The potential impact on an already-strained City budget, along with a finite tax base, raises questions regarding the fiscal soundness of implementing the Plan at this time.

Overall, the Great River Passage Master Plan is an important initiative and contains many features that the Highland District Council fully supports. The District 15 Highland Park Neighborhood Plan adopted in 2007, includes Parks and Recreation and Environmental goals of “protecting existing natural resources and park amenities” and “preserving and enhancing environmental amenities in the District.” Furthermore, the GRP Master Plan section on Shepard Road is consistent with the Shepard Davern Small Area Plan, adopted in 1999.

The Highland District Council has held multiple meetings and adopted several resolutions regarding the Plan which are attached. These resolutions do not reflect final positions of the Highland District Council and our organization wishes to continue to review and provide additional feedback throughout the planning and implementation of proposed GRP projects.

Sincerely,

Kathy Carruth
Executive Director
Highland District Council

Tia Anderson
President
Highland District Council



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Resolution Regarding the Great River Passage Master Plan

Whereas, having accessible, well maintained parks are an important asset to our community in that they increase property values, provide recreation space for residents, aid in storm water treatment and air quality, and improve the overall quality of life in our neighborhood and the City of Saint Paul; and

Whereas, the City of Saint Paul initiated a project in 2010 to develop a long term Master Plan for the Great River Passage (GRP), the City's 17 miles of Mississippi River parklands, and created a Community Task Force to assist in the visioning process to become more natural, more urban, and more connected; and

Whereas, Highland Park has approximately five miles of riverfront within its district, including The Gorge, Hidden Falls Park, Shepard Road, and Crosby Farm Park; and

Whereas, a significant portion of the GRP parkland along the Mississippi River is within the floodplain and has flooded on a regular basis in recent history leaving river parkland inaccessible for significant periods of time; and

Whereas, the District 15 Highland Park Neighborhood Plan adopted in 2007, includes Parks and Recreation and Environmental goals of "protecting existing natural resources and park amenities" and "preserving and enhancing environmental amenities in the District;" and

Whereas, representatives of the Highland District Council participated on the GRP Community Task Force; and

Whereas, the Highland District Council adopted a resolution on February 4, 2011, which was submitted to the Community Task Force supporting a focus on the natural setting of the GRP within Highland Park; and

Whereas, the City of Saint Paul released the sizable and detailed Great River Passage Master Plan to the public on January 11, 2012; and

Whereas, the Highland District Council hosted a community meeting on February 2, 2012, where Don Ganje, GRP project manager, presented an overview of the GRP Master Plan and fielded questions from residents and board members; and

Whereas, the GRP Master Plan was presented to the Highland District Council and community as a vision and aspiration rather than an action plan; and

Whereas, the public process for consideration and adoption of the GRP Master Plan has not been completed as of the date of this Resolution; and

Whereas, members of the HDC have expressed significant concern over the lack of neighborhood involvement in the specifics detailed in the GRP Master Plan; and

Whereas, the Highland District Council will continue to review the GRP Master Plan and recognizes the need for additional discussion regarding the Master Plan's potential impact on Highland Park as the HDC prepares to provide testimony for formal public hearings;

Be it resolved, that the Highland District Council requests that specific changes or additions to park land or park amenities contained in the Great River Passage proposal be subjected to a formal process of public notification and hearings, before application is made to either plan or fund a specific project (similar to a Small Area Plan whereby there is a process of local district council and community notification and review, followed by formal public hearings and City Council adoption); and

Be it further resolved, that the request for further public input into the plan details does not imply Highland District Council support or opposition of individual projects currently identified in the GRP Master Plan.

Adopted on March 29, 2013
By the Highland District Council



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Resolution Recommending Removal of *Chapter 7- Implementation* from the GRP Master Plan

Whereas members of the Highland District Council are concerned about recent recreation center cut backs and a potential future squeeze on funds for existing facilities and programming of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation from new development within GRP; and

Whereas the GRP Master Plan is meant to be a 20 – 30 year plan and may therefore evolve over time, the Plan codifies significant new changes to the City of Saint Paul's Parks and Recreation Department's structure in *Chapter 7 – Implementation*; and

Whereas, the GRP Master Plan has significant budget implications for the City of Saint Paul immediately and for the future; and

Whereas the GRP Master Plan's description of funding sources are inadequate to assess budget impacts on existing Park programming and facilities and other departments in the City;

Be it resolved, that the Highland District Council recommends removal of *Chapter 7 – Implementation* of the Great River Passage final plan to be adopted by the Saint Paul City Council; and

Be it further resolved, that a new revised *Chapter 7 – Implementation Plan* be fully vetted in the City at such time as grant money and general fund money can be budgeted to pay for the GRP Master Plan's implementation.

Adopted on March 29, 2013
By the Highland District Council



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Resolution Regarding the Gorge Regional Park within the Great River Passage Master Plan

Whereas, The Gorge Regional Park portion of the Great River Passage is recognized as a critical natural area with unique geological and historical significance and stretches south to Highway 5, beyond that depicted in the GRP Master Plan maps; and

Whereas, the GRP Master Plan's focus for The Gorge area is on preservation of sensitive areas and recreation outside sensitive ecological areas; and

Whereas, a formal delineation between natural areas and active areas within The Gorge including Hidden Falls Park may serve to protect the critical natural areas of the GRP; and

Whereas, the Highland District Council recognizes the long-standing agreement between Highland Park residents and the City to limit bicycle lanes along Mississippi River Boulevard;

Whereas, the Highland District Council will continue to review the GRP Master Plan and recognizes the need for additional discussion regarding the Master Plan's potential impact on Highland Park as the HDC prepares to provide testimony for formal public hearings;

Be it resolved, that the Highland District Council opposes any potential new on-street bicycle lanes on Mississippi River Boulevard; and

Be it further resolved, that the Highland District Council recommends the City make it a priority to seek funding to obtain portions of the Ford site bluff area, main Ford site, and downstream from the Ford dam for the Great River Passage.

Adopted on March 29, 2013
By the Highland District Council



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Resolution in Support of Shepard Road within the Great River Passage Master Plan

Whereas, the Great River Passage Master Plan calls for Shepard Road to become an extension of the historic vision of the Grand Round; and

Whereas, members of the Highland District Council acknowledge that Shepard Road needs changes to make it safer for bikers and pedestrians and improve access to the river yet continue to serve as a major vehicular thoroughfare connecting the airport and points south and west with downtown Saint Paul; and

Whereas, the GRP Master Plan section on Shepard Road is consistent with the Shepard Davern Small Area Plan, which was completed in 1999 following a rigorous local community process, but acknowledging that the Highland District Council has requested that the Saint Paul Planning Commission initiate a review and possible update of the Shepard Davern Small Area Plan; and

Whereas, members of the Highland District Council are concerned over the lack of project cost estimates and timeline identified in the GRP Master Plan for Shepard Road; and

Whereas, the Highland District Council recognizes the need for additional discussion regarding the GRP Master Plan's potential impact on Highland Park and will continue to review and work to influence implementation of project details;

Be it resolved that the Highland District Council supports the general intent of the Shepard Road section of the Great River Passage Master Plan.

Adopted on March 29, 2013
By the Highland District Council

