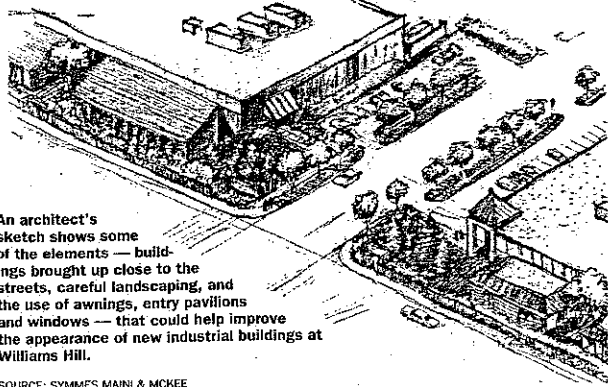


Dear City Council Members-

I wanted to submit this article for your review regarding the 650 Pelham appeal. A couple of quick points:

- 1) The community has been trying to work with the Port Authority on better industrial building design that is in better coordination with the rest of our city/plans for quite some time. So our site plan complaints and requests should have been of no surprise to the Port Authority.
- 2) Although not all was done that should've been done at Williams Hill, the Port Authority did take steps they aren't taking at 650 Pelham, why are they going backwards especially in light of our comprehensive & sub-area plans that actually now compel these types of better coordinated designs.
- 3) New Urbanism has gone from "on the fringes" in 1998 to being widely accepted & practiced in our urban cores, especially in Midway type areas. New Urbanism principles are the keys to helping the 650 site plan fit, as required by city zoning code, with our comprehensive & sub-area plans.

Thank you for your consideration!
JOHN SCHATZ, 535 Glendale Street, ST. PAUL



An architect's sketch shows some of the elements — buildings brought up close to the streets, careful landscaping, and the use of awnings, entry pavilions and windows — that could help improve the appearance of new industrial buildings at Williams Hill.

SOURCE: SYMMES MAINI & MCKEE ASSOCIATES/WINSOR FARLEY

It's hard to argue with the basic idea behind the Phalen Corridor Initiative, which is an ambitious plan to create up to 2,000 jobs by developing new industry along an underused rail line on St. Paul's East Side.

But there is something worth arguing about when it comes to how the proposed industrial corridor, which is being developed by the St. Paul Port Authority, should be designed.

4/7/98

Much of the argument is coming from Brian McMahon, an architectural historian who is also project manager for the North East Neighborhoods Development Corp. in St. Paul.

McMahon thinks the Phalen Corridor Initiative is so important to the East Side and all of St. Paul that it deserves the same close attention to design that has gone into riverfront and downtown planning.

He's particularly concerned about the first and most visible phase of the initiative — the Williams Hill Business Center, an industrial park being developed by the St. Paul Port Authority on a 32-acre site near Mississippi Street and Interstate 35E. Up to four companies are expected to locate at the park, bringing in hundreds of new jobs.



LARRY MILLETT ARCHITECTURE CRITIC

"It's an unbelievable opportunity," McMahon says of Williams Hill, which is likely to prove especially attractive for development because of its location close to freeways and railroad tracks.

What McMahon has in mind for Williams Hill and the rest of the corridor is a radical departure from the sprawling "industrial park" model used for years in St. Paul and most other American cities.

The elements of this model are numbingly familiar: big, nearly windowless one-story industrial boxes served by wide suburban-style access roads and acres of asphalt parking, all set within vast expanses of chemically treated lawn augmented by the usual collection of nondescript trees and shrubs.

This box-in-the-lawn formula offers certain ruthless efficiencies, but it is also profoundly anti-urban because it fails to provide any connection between industrial work, so vital to society, and the larger community it serves.

Yet this dreary model has now come to seem almost inevitable, as though handed down on stone tablets by the gods of industrial development.

The truth, of course, is that there are other ways to create industrial complexes, ways that in the long run can benefit workers, owners and the community as a whole.

In fact, there was a time when industrial design in this country was done with considerable panache, as McMahon points out in a slide show he's prepared. The stately brick warehouses of Lowertown and the superb daylight factories of Albert Kahn (who designed the original St. Paul Ford plant and a 3M Co building on the East Side) provide good examples of how industrial plants were built before the box-in-the-lawn era.

McMahon's dream for the Phalen Corridor is an industrial zone designed in accord with the same New Urbanism principles espoused

VISION, CONTINUED ON 2C

A Vision Worth Watching

Brian McMahon's dream for the new Phalen Corridor industrial park won't come true this time, but his design ideal holds up under scrutiny.



An early conceptual drawing of Williams Hill Business Center shows nothing except black-walled boxes set amid giant parking lots. The St. Paul Port Authority, which is developing the industrial park, says the final design will be much better.

VISION

V CONTINUED FROM 1C

by the city's downtown development framework.

The term "New Urbanism" is a misnomer, since it's actually a design philosophy that embraces traditional ways of place-making. In the case of Phalen Corridor, this would mean an emphasis on mixed uses (McMahon, for example, favors a blend of commercial, residential and industrial development), multi-story buildings, preservation of traditional street grids and mass transit, among many other things.

In the best of all possible worlds — which at last report this was not — the kind of organic, integrated industrial development favored by McMahon would be an everyday occurrence.

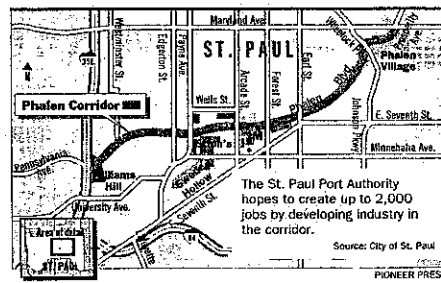
But in the case of Williams Hill, it isn't going to happen, although the Port Authority, to its credit, has taken steps to make the new business center more attractive than its many drab predecessors.

This will be accomplished through a series of design covenants requiring that new buildings at Williams Hill be located near streets, use high-grade exterior materials (instead of the ubiquitous concrete tilt-up panels found on many industrial buildings), and have at least a few windows.

But even with these covenants, Williams Hill will be nothing like the sort of industrial village McMahon has in mind.

From the Port Authority's viewpoint, the problem with McMahon's vision is that it collides head-on with the demands of real-world industry.

"Our customer is an industrial manufacturer," says Bill Morin, the Port Authority's director of real estate. "These businesses typically are not excited about



Phalen Corridor

The city of St. Paul and East Side businesses are exploring and promoting construction of a new road, industrial development and a recreational trail in what they call the Phalen Corridor. They are banking on the plan to reinvigorate the East Side.

The St. Paul Port Authority hopes to create up to 2,000 jobs by developing industry in the corridor.

SOURCE: CITY OF ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS

doing something different."

In other words, business wants to do business as usual, and that's why McMahon faces a steep uphill battle in his quest for a new industrial order.

The industrial "park" model he opposes is deeply entrenched in everything from architectural practice to zoning law, whereas the New Urbanism, despite all the publicity it has garnered in recent years, remains on the fringes of mainstream development. In fact, it is still widely (and, alas, in some cases, correctly) perceived as little more than a way for very rich people to exercise their taste for costly nostalgia.

This is not generally true; but New Urbanism and its kindred movements are, at bottom, efforts to change not just design but society's entire approach to development and place-making.

Given New Urbanism's revolutionary agenda, it is hardly surprising the Port Authority — which has

always seen itself primarily as a job-creation agency — prefers to stick to well-established modes of development.

Still, McMahon is doing the Port Authority, and the city as a whole, a favor by raising questions about the prevailing model for industrial development.

The first step toward change is always a recognition of new possibilities, the discovery that there is a different and maybe better way to do what needs to be done.

Williams Hill, which is located in what is already a heavily industrialized part of the city, will not be the place where the new order envisioned by McMahon takes root.

But elsewhere in the Phalen Corridor (perhaps around the old Stroh's Brewery complex) there may be opportunities to make some small first steps toward creating true industrial communities.

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