



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

360 North Robert Street Suite 400
St. Paul, MN 55101
p: 651-222-2193
f: 651-222-6005
w: www.fmr.org

April 30, 2015

Saint Paul City Council Members
15 W Kellogg Blvd #310
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Saint Paul City Council Members:

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a non-profit community-based organization that works to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities region. We have 2,600 active members and 3,000 active volunteers who care deeply about the river's unique public values.

We are writing in advance of the May 6, 2015 city council public hearing for the West Side Flats Master Plan Update to urge the Council to approve the plan as proposed.

FMR has been involved throughout the West Side Flats Master Plan Update planning process. We held a seat on the plan's Community Task Force and regularly attended meetings providing our input. As the Community Task Force neared the end of the planning process, we held a public educational event in collaboration with the West Side Community Organization (WSCO) and the National Park Service/MNRRRA at the Wellstone Center called *The Valley of Saint Paul: The Legacy of an Iconic Landscape*. The event featured a keynote by MNRRRA Superintendent John Anfinson and a panel discussion that included Tony Kuechle of Sherman Associates, Hakan Miller of WSCO and Lucy Thompson of the City of Saint Paul Planning Department. Over 65 people attended the event and heard about the significance of the area, the proposed draft plan, the neighborhood perspective and area developers' perspective. The event helped inform a Community Task Force compromise on building height that was later supported by WSCO and remains in the plan today.

FMR strongly believes that the plan should be approved as proposed. It is fully supported by the Community Task Force, WSCO, and the Saint Paul Planning Commission. We are particularly interested in ensuring that the building height limits established in the Plan are not increased and the gradual height gradient increase from the Mississippi River to the bluffline remains unchanged. We believe this will preserve the sense of place one feels post-development in the West Side Flats and throughout the valley. It is essential to maintain views of the blufftop, as recognized in the Mississippi River Corridor Plan, a chapter of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan (see Figure Y from page 48).



The plan update will preserve views of the bluffs, with the height criteria as proposed. The update will also provide development guidance for more of the West Side Flats area not previously included in the plan. This includes the area east of Robert Street and would prevent new buildings from obstructing the bluffline like the 126-foot Comcast Building pictured below.



There are a number of other points within the plan that we would like to highlight. The plan includes new parkland and trails that connect people to the Mississippi River and create recreational loops. There are many planned stormwater features that follow best practices for stormwater management, and provide landscaping to protect water quality and add green space. There are multi-modal facilities for pedestrians, bikes and transit. The plan calls for the re-establishment of the street grid to provide better visual and physical access to the river. All of these plan components advance the City's vision for this area and make this plan update something the City can be proud of and work enthusiastically to implement.

FMR believes that this plan update will provide an excellent guide for future development on the West Side Flats, and as implemented, help create a vibrant riverfront community. We urge the Saint Paul City Council to honor the community planning process and pass the West Side Flats Master Plan Update with the building heights as proposed.

Sincerely,

Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director