East Side Employment xChange

TO: Ward 6 City Council Member Nelsie Yang, and Saint Paul City Council
DATE: May 24, 2022
RE: Support for Master Plan Approval for The Heights Redevelopment

The East Side Employment xChange is a collaborative effort of 14 partners, all of whom are invested in building the prosperity of the East Side for residents and local businesses. Our collaboration is focused on creating more equitable and more numerous employment opportunities for the East Side of Saint Paul by offering a different approach to helping residents prepare for, find, and advance in employment and working alongside employers to improve their hiring practices. Our long-term vision is to support East Side residents in building community wealth for the next seven generations.

We are writing to document our support of the Hillcrest Master Plan for redevelopment. The plan's integration of housing, light industrial space, and proximity to transit routes will benefit the residents of the East Side by bringing additional accessible employment opportunities nearby. Our support is based on the following:

- In a survey we conducted last year of East Side Residents, of more than 400 responses, 45% of respondents indicated they sometimes or frequently experience challenges in traveling around town. The frequency of transportation cited as a barrier to employment opportunities is not surprising to our partners. This is why we prioritize relationships with businesses and hiring partners in and around the East Side; we know that access to good jobs equates to jobs within reasonable distances and along public transportation routes for our communities.
- In that same survey, many respondents reported that it is especially challenging for individuals with justice involvement to access quality jobs. Background checks, which many employers still use even when it is not state mandated, limit access to employment because background check vendors are not widely regulated, and the criminal justice system itself has disparate impacts on within our communities, especially Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian American individuals – who make up a significant portion of the East Side population. Light industrial employers are not typically mandated to conduct background checks on their employees, which makes their hiring processes more flexible and their employment opportunities more accessible.
- Light industrial jobs pay significantly more than minimum wage, as evidenced by St. Paul Port Authority's own reporting, and typically offer opportunities for internal advancement without the need of post-secondary degrees, ensuring that careers are accessible to a wider population of job seekers.
- For the past 4 years, we have partnered with the Saint Paul Port Authority (SPPA) to connect residents of the East Side with employment opportunities, including those at business customers of the SPPA. We are confident that, as The Heights project advances, the xChange and SPPA can continue to work together to help East Side residents access employment opportunities throughout the redevelopment process and beyond.

For these reasons, the East Side Employment xChange supports the Hillcrest Master Plan designed for the redevelopment of the the Hillcrest Golf Course. We look forward to partnering with businesses and employers to help shape quality, accessible job opportunities within the East Side, and to connect residents to those job opportunities.

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