ESABA
East Side Area Business Association

Advocating Success for St. Paul's ***Diverse*** *East Side Business Community*

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Paris Dunning

May 24, 2022

Dear Members of the St. Paul City Council,

The East Side Area Business Association (ESABA) represents 130 businesses. Our board strives to listen to our members, discern our position on matters critical to our vision of St. Paul's East Side as a destination for food, culture, and entertainment; and as an economic engine for entrepreneurship and innovation. We work every day to create opportunities, educate, and advocate success for St. Paul's diverse East Side business community. We have been following the conversation of the City's Master Plan for Hillcrest, now known as The Heights, sponsoring and attending meetings for the public and our members, and talking about the scope of the anticipated impact of the project.

We are writing to support passing the proposed Master Plan. We are energized by aspects of the plan like the carbon neutral LEED Certification goals and energy infrastructure, workforce agreements, and affordable housing targets. Our Board considers the goals of 1000 new jobs, 1000 new housing units, and the amenities emphasized in the plan to be goals worth stretching for. We are committed to helping ensure the development meets these goals and delivers the best potential for East Side residents and businesses.

To achieve these goals:

- We believe the Saint Paul Port Authority needs the ability to access other city funds including TIF for infrastructure to really deliver what East Siders deserve and to give the plan the leverage to include more of the amenities needed. Tying the hands of the developer appears to be more neglect of our side of town. The Council should take action to amend this.

- The Saint Paul Port Authority has acknowledged they are not housing developers. We believe the City's Housing and Redevelopment Authority should step up as Master Developer of the housing to really do the City's work in the best way for its taxpayers.

- This development gives the City a chance, along with other governmental and community partners, to work with us to improve the roads, library, rec centers, shopping centers, and schools that desperately need attention to serve the current residents and businesses as well as the anticipated 1000 households and 1000 workers and new business owners The Heights will add.

Help us Maximize this opportunity

Living wage jobs and affordable housing accessible to East Siders are critical to maximize this project for the East Side. East Siders remember times when working class jobs paid well enough for people to work, live and play in the same community. Those jobs fueled thriving commercial corridors bustling with retail activity and vibrant connections to community assets like our parks, schools, religious institutions, and libraries.

For The Heights to be that kind of investment, the workforce agreements in this plan need to be heeded and even higher wages made accessible to East Side residents and to people who could afford to rent or buy in the new affordable housing in the project. Good wages and affordable housing, including home ownership, equal a chance for households to spend time and money on the corridors that border the development and are our best opportunity to showcase our diverse business community and revitalize corridors with additional investment. Similarly, business to business transactions will create a strong multiplier effect if the new businesses at The Heights look to current East Side businesses as vendors.

The LEED Certification and energy infrastructure would make this project and the East Side an example of sustainability and are essential in the climate crisis in which all businesses and residents must adapt. We urge the City to fully fund the affordable housing and energy infrastructure needs of the project and help ensure the workforce agreements are implemented. We are energized and committed to working with the developer, the incoming businesses, and the City to make sure these opportunities can be accessed by members of the East Side community.

Help us make sure The Heights is a true opportunity for the East Side by passing this Master Plan, making the necessary changes to give the development its best chances to fully fund and achieve its goals, and work with us to ensure the deliverables are things that East Side residents and businesses are prepared to access and enjoy.

Sincerely,

Paris Dunning
Executive Director