

Minneapolis neighborhood makes a deal and history

The Longfellow Community Council announced the region's first legally binding pact between residents and a developer.

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The Longfellow Community Council announced Tuesday that it has become the first community group in the Twin Cities area to sign a legally binding community benefits agreement with a developer.

The pact covers development of the abandoned Purina Mills site on the east side of Hiawatha Avenue at E. 38th Street, a first-phase project with 197 housing units, 40,000 square feet of stores and parking.

"It was kind of a mind-boggling amount of work," said Ralph Wyman, who helped lead negotiations for the council.

Community benefits agreements bind a developer to build a project with features that go beyond the normal zoning, land-use and financing requirements.

For example, the Longfellow Station will include more affordable rental housing than the city requires, the neighborhood said. Another major feature reserves 30 percent of commercial space for local businesses, with a third of that for startups or second-location businesses.

Developer Dale Joel also agreed to use green construction methods, sell transit passes, provide bike storage and space for a car-sharing rental business, and work to improve connections for walkers and bikers to the light-rail station across Hiawatha.

"It really speaks to the developer's interest in being part of the community," said Minneapolis City Council Member Gary Schiff, who represents the area. "Perhaps that's because he grew up in the community."

Several other groups in the Twin Cities have been exploring such agreements with developers, according to the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability. One is the Harrison Neighborhood Association for redevelopment of Bassett Creek Valley in Minneapolis. The concept has been considered for redevelopments in Brooklyn Park and Arden Hills.

An agreement also was negotiated with community input for the wireless service contract between Minneapolis and US Internet.