

Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division
Small Area Plan/Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Date: January 14, 2008

Project Name: Uptown Small Area Plan

Submitted By: CPED Community Planning Division

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Wards: 10 and 7 (one block front in Ward 7)

Neighborhood Organizations:

East Isles Residents Association
Lowry Hill East Neighborhood Association
East Calhoun Community Organization
Calhoun Area Residents Action Group

Current Minneapolis Plan Designations:

Activity Center – Uptown
Commercial Corridors – Lake, Lagoon, Hennepin (from Lake to Franklin)
Community Corridors – Hennepin (from Lake to 36th Street)
Major Housing Site – The Midtown Greenway

Background

In early 2006, the Planning Division began work on the Uptown Small Area Plan. The Minneapolis Plan calls for more detailed planning to be done around each of the designated Activity Centers. In 2005 several major developments were proposed, enhancing the need for a more detailed land use vision for the area.

From Spring 2006 to Fall 2007, City staff and the project consultants worked with a Steering Committee made up of representatives from the four Uptown neighborhoods, the South Hennepin Business Association, the Uptown Association, and the Midtown Greenway Coalition. Council Member Ralph Remington chaired the committee and appointed six additional individuals who did not represent specific groups. The steering committee met twelve times between the beginning of June 2006 and the end of December 2007. In addition, nine community meetings were held to provide information and receive input from the broader community. Other outreach included direct mail, an online survey, focus group meetings, regular e-mail updates, and a project website.

The 45-day public review period began on October 5, 2007 and ended on November 21, 2007. Updates were given at the City Planning Commission's Committee of the Whole in October 2006, June 2007, and November 2007. For the November 2007 meeting the Commissioners were provided with the draft of the plan that was released for the 45-day public comment period.

Plan Summary

The primary purpose of the plan is to provide more detailed policy direction for land use and

development in the Uptown area. The plan strives to recognize, protect, and enhance established neighborhoods; recognize the value and benefits of high-quality, well-located, and well-designed urban density; celebrate Uptown's adjacency to the Lakes and the Midtown Greenway, prioritize streets as places for social interaction and urban activity; and accept the dual role of Uptown as a regional attraction and local community.

The plan breaks Uptown into six different character areas, recognizing that different parts of the study area have different characteristics and should evolve differently over time. These sub areas are: the Hennepin Avenue Commercial Corridor, the Urban Village, the Activity Center, the West Lake Street Live/Work area, the South Hennepin Community Corridor, and Neighborhoods. To guide land use throughout the study area, the Plan contains a land use plan and a development intensity map. The plan also contains a series of recommendations related to open space and access (i.e. pedestrian and bicycle, transit, parking, and traffic).

Analysis – Major Considerations and Issues

The Character of Uptown.

Preservation of the character of Uptown was a concern raised by many throughout the planning process. The plan attempts to balance likely new development with existing conditions. It also suggests that Uptown can be a destination location and the heart of four thriving neighborhoods. To help accomplish this, the plan breaks the study area down into six character areas. It suggests that most growth should be focused in the Activity Center and Urban Village (together these are referred to as “the core”) because there are more large lots, surface parking lots, and under-utilized parcels in these areas. Building envelopes and a “stepping down” of land uses are suggested to create comfortable transitions between the core of Uptown and the surrounding lower density residential areas. A development intensity map (Page 87) and suggested building types and frontages are included to lend support and additional description to the land use map.

Land Use

The Uptown Small Area Plan contains a future land use map on Page 80. This map is made up of land use categories and densities that have been commonly used in recent small area plans. Generally speaking, the future land use map calls for mixed-use commercial development along most of Lake St., Lagoon Ave., and Hennepin Ave. The parcels between the Midtown Greenway and 28th Street have a high density residential designation adjacent to the Greenway and a medium density residential designation along 28th Street. High density housing is also called for south the Greenway/Mall west of Hennepin. Medium density housing is suggested as a transition between commercial uses along the south side of Lake Street and lower density residential areas to the south. Along Hennepin Avenue south of 32nd Street a mix of medium density residential and mixed-use commercial development is suggested.

Comprehensive Plan land use designations

The Uptown Small Area Plan proposes two refinements to the existing land use designations in the current comprehensive plan. Currently Hennepin Avenue is a Commercial Corridor from Franklin Avenue to Lake Street, and a Community Corridor from Lake Street to 36th Street. Commercial Corridors have a mix of uses, with commercial uses dominating, whereas Community Corridors have a land use pattern that is primarily residential with intermittent commercial uses clustered at intersections in the a pattern of nodes. It is recommended the Commercial Corridor designation on

Hennepin Ave. be extended from Lake Street to 31st Street, since Calhoun Square and the commercial uses across the street are more typical of a Commercial Corridor than a Community Corridor.

The Uptown Small Area Plan also suggests a boundary for the Activity Center. Activity Centers are places where a mix of uses that hold appeal for many residents and visitors are located and activity is present into the evening. In the current comprehensive plan Activity Center boundaries are not defined. The proposed boundary is depicted on Page 79 and in the discussions of the Character Areas. It runs from just north of the Uptown Transit Center at Hennepin Ave. and the Midtown Greenway to 31st Street and from Irving Avenue to a varying line between Girard Avenue and Fremont Avenue.

Currently in the comprehensive plan, the Midtown Greenway is identified as a Major Housing Site. This land use designation is not being carried forward in the current draft of the updated comprehensive plan, so it was not discussed in the Uptown Small Area Plan. However, high and medium density housing is called for along the Midtown Greenway in the future land use plan in the Uptown Small Area Plan.

Relationship with the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan

The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan was adopted by the City Council in February 2007. A portion of the Uptown Small Area Plan study area overlaps with the Midtown Greenway plan area. Parcels north of Lagoon Ave., east of Humboldt Ave., south of 28th St., and west of Bryant Ave. are included in both plans.

The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan includes parcels on each side of the Midtown Greenway from the western boundary of the City to Hiawatha Avenue. Because it is a large and varied study area, the land use recommendations and design guidelines in that plan are more general than those in the Uptown Small Area Plan, which focus on the Greenway in relation to the retail center and four neighborhoods of Uptown.

The Uptown Small Area Plan retained most of the land use designations for the parcels which are included in both plans, with a few exceptions. Two large parcels, one on the southwestern corner of the intersection of 28th St. and Hennepin Avenue and one on the northwest corner of Hennepin Avenue and Greenway, were designated commercial mixed-use in the Midtown Greenway plan. The Uptown Small Area Plan suggests two land uses for each of these parcels, mixed-use commercial on Hennepin and residential (high density for one parcel and medium density for another) on the “back half” of the parcels. This change was made to suggest that future development should incorporate residential uses into a mixed-use project to transition into surrounding residential areas. In addition, the block bordered by Lake St., Dupont Ave., the Midtown Greenway, and Colfax Ave. S. was suggested for both commercial mixed-use and high density development in the Midtown Greenway plan. In the Uptown Small Area Plan, this whole block is designated as commercial mixed-use.

The Uptown Small Area Plan provides more specific guidance on height than the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan does. The Midtown Greenway plan contains design guidelines and sample building types that describe appropriate scale and design features along the Greenway. The Uptown plan builds on this and provides additional guidance on height along the Greenway, suggesting that taller buildings (or taller portions of

buildings) should be located along the major corridors of Lake St., Lagoon Ave., and Hennepin Ave. The Uptown Plan suggest that building should be stepped back on the south side of the Greenway to prevent shadowing (like the Midtown Greenway Plan does), and also suggests that height on the north side of the Greenway should be lower than that in the core of Uptown in order to provide a transition into the residential area to the north.

The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan and the Uptown Small Area Plan both contain maps showing suggested development intensity and sample building types. These maps are designed to complement the future land use plans and suggest building forms that might be appropriate. Both plans use intensity categories of Neighborhood Oriented, Urban Oriented, and Transit Oriented, with Transit Oriented being the most intense. The suggested building types in the two plans vary because of the difference between a context that is limited to the Greenway in the Midtown Greenway plan and a context of the Uptown business district and Uptown neighborhoods in the Uptown Small Area Plan. The development intensities are very similar on the parcels contained in both plans. One difference is that the western portion of the block bordered by Lagoon Ave., Humboldt Ave., the Greenway, and Hennepin Avenue was changed from Transit Oriented to Urban Oriented in the Uptown Plan. A second difference is that the two blocks bordered by Lagoon Ave., Emerson Ave., 29th St., and Dupont Ave., are designated as Urban Oriented in the Midtown Greenway plan and have been changed to Transit Oriented in the Uptown Small Area Plan.

Height and Scale

The height and scale of new construction was a strong concern expressed during the public planning process. The Uptown plan deals with the issue in several ways. First, as mentioned, the plan divides the study area into various “character areas” and indicates that most large scale new development should occur in the core of Uptown (the Activity Center and Urban Village). Second, the plan discusses the existing character of each character area and outlines preferred heights. Preferred heights are suggested to acknowledge the interest in being responsive to the existing character of each sub-area.

However, the zoning code can not address all preferences for height, and growth will be incremental and varied. For example, the zoning code outlines heights of two, four, and six stories; whereas building of three to five stories might be appropriate on most sites and sculpted buildings with stepped back upper floors may be desired. For this reason, the plan goes on to describe height in a third context, that of a suggested “building envelope” that shows how buildings can be shaped to have stepped back height and how height can transition down from the core of Uptown to the neighborhoods. Sections depicting this building envelop are based on the permitted heights in the zoning code: 6 stories or 84’, 4 stories or 56’, and 2 stories or 35’.

The plan indicates that buildings with stepped back upper floors with portions potentially reaching up to 84’ are appropriate along major corridors in the Activity Center and Urban Village. To provide transitions, the building envelope suggests buildings with heights of 56’ north of the Midtown Greenway and on the south side of Lake Street (see page 76 and other pages referenced there.) The plan states that buildings that exceed this outlined building envelope should off set their potential impact with public amenities, and a broader public discussion that weighs the overall public contributions of an individual project should be expected in the event that a taller building is proposed.

Open Space

Uptown is a desirable place in part because its proximity to the lakes and the Midtown Greenway. However, relatively little open space currently exists in the core of Uptown. The Uptown Small Area Plan suggests that future open spaces in Uptown be in the form of a series of smaller urban oriented spaces that are connected to each other and other existing open spaces through high quality sidewalks and promenades. The expansion of sidewalks, through reconstruction and/or additional building setbacks, is promoted in the plan, as is incremental greening wherever possible.

Access

The Uptown Small Area Plan addresses pedestrian and bicycle facilities, transit, parking, and traffic and streets individually and contains recommendations for each. Some traffic issues experienced in Uptown are beyond what could be addressed in a small area plan. Lake Street is a city wide corridor carrying traffic to and through Uptown. Growth to the west has created more traffic coming through Uptown going to downtown, and remedies will need to be addressed through regional transit planning.

In 2005, Public Works commissioned the Uptown Parking and Transportation Study. The Uptown Small Area Plan supports many of the recommendations of that plan. The 2005 study found that existing parking supply exceeded demand at most times of the day. However, better parking management would be needed in the future. The Uptown Small Area Plans recommends that a group of business leaders, property owners, and residents be established to promote better management of existing parking resources and promote transit.

The Uptown plan suggest that opportunities to reduce lane width and number on Lake St. and Lagoon Ave. be explored in order to create more pedestrian friendly streets with wider sidewalks. The plan also suggests the future analysis of the current one-way pairs of Lake and Lagoon is warranted. Each of these recommendations would require more analysis beyond the scope of the small area plan.

Public Comments

During the 45-day public comment period forty letters were received. Staff reviewed these letters; attempted to identify major points; sorted them between comments related to substantial issues, comments related to issues needing clarifications, and general comments; and provided a staff response where appropriate in the attached table. Building height was the most common substantial issue raised.

Since the close of the comment period, staff and the project consultants have made edits where appropriate to add clarification and omit errors. Staff and the consultants have made every effort to make these adjustments without changing major content. Edits made to the document since the 45-day public comment period are described in italics in the attached table.

Future Related Actions

Implementation of the plan recommendations is part of planning staff's 2008 work plan and will likely continue into the future through various partnerships.

Comprehensive plan changes. This small area plan will be incorporated into the update of the city's comprehensive plan, and its Future Land Use map will be incorporated into the comprehensive plan's

citywide Future Land Use map.

Rezoning study. Zoning changes compatible with this plan's land use recommendations will be made through an upcoming rezoning study.

Development review. Future development proposals for property in the Uptown area will require Planning Commission review of development applications such as rezonings, conditional use permits, and site plan review. Thus, the Planning Commission also has a role in the incremental implementation of the plan.

Reference Materials/Attachments

Updated draft of the Uptown Small Area Plan (Appendices can be found on the project website at <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/planning/uptown-plan.asp>)

A compilation of the comments received during the 45 day public comment period

The full text of the comments received

Future land use and development intensity maps from the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan

RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – PLANNING DIVISION:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the City Planning Commission and City Council **adopt** the Uptown Small Area Plan as an articulation of and amendment to the policies found in the City's comprehensive plan.